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Issue 73
April 00
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The Music Production Magazine

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Yamaha A5000 & A4000

Hands-on sampling is back with a vengeance

King of the jingle
Ad maestro Tot Taylor reveals trade secrets

Wavelab 3
Steinberg's audio editor revamped

Sony DRE-S777
What £4k of reverb can do for your sound

ON TEST
Manley Massive Passive
AKG C3000B
Synchro Arts VocALign
ATC SCM20A

PLUS
Monitors Pt. II
Perfect speaker placement explained

Smith & Mighty
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YAMAHA

www.yamaha.co.uk

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Media with passion

The age of plastic

Since leaving German electronic trailblazers Tangerine Dream in 1991, composer, performer and producer Paul Haslinger has been continually pursuing his own studio-based dream in the movie maker's Mecca that is Hollywood

I've always seen music as a language, fortunate in its lack of grammar; a language that every person around the planet relates to in one way or another, so it's quite natural for me to choose my vocabulary from as wide a range as possible. And it's for this reason that the majority of my technical attention has been dedicated to samplers and audio processing – though I could easily spend the next 10 years just working on modifications of sounds I've already got in a raw state!

I try to keep every unit in my set-up on a computer screen, or under direct hand control, so that, at every stage in the composition process, I can tweak, change, and re-sample sounds. But, just as there are still analogue machines, turntables and tube mics, there will be parts of our creative process that we don't want to be computer-controllable. When electric motors were invented, it was a big deal. Today, nobody calls a vacuum cleaner or a dishwasher an 'electric motor device'. I predict the same will happen with computers – they will cease to become an issue; just something we use.

Put it this way: eclecticism will reach a new level in coming years. It's the ability to make the right selection out of a million possibilities that's going to be key – the sense for direction and the naïveté to stick with a chosen path.

So, for me, the most interesting aspect of making music today is how you choose to assemble it. Historically and philosophically, the Latin root of *componere* – or composition – means 'to put together'. And that's how many producers are working today. I remember Trevor Horn once being asked about the increasingly blurred relationship between artist and producer – the interviewer was probably thinking about Frankie Goes To Hollywood, or some similar project – and he replied, "It really doesn't matter. All that's needed is an idea that works".

The people who change the face of music won't be the ones with the best and latest technology; they'll just be the ones who make the best choices. The music of the future will be less predetermined by regional and stylistic barriers. It will be global in every aspect – not just pop, by the way; I think this will happen to any kind of music, no matter how simple or complicated its structure might be.

On the other hand, there will always be boring stuff, and people who sell and buy it. It goes well with the corporate culture out there, and it serves as nicely prepared plastic entertainment. Look back in time, though, and you'll find that even in Mozart's era the same principles were on display: promotion of the mediocre; neglect of the original; QED [*quod erat demonstrandum*] – nothing that biogenetics couldn't fix in the next 200 years!

Paul Haslinger

about THE MiX

THE MiX is the essential accessory for the recording studio. Our equipment reviews, written by working producers and engineers, give you an impartial opinion of the latest studio and recording gear, and our interviews get to the heart of the current techniques and issues in the recording industry.

THE MiX cover-mounted CD helps you produce better music, by providing a varied monthly selection of collectable studio-quality samples provided by some of the top pro's in the business, demos of the latest software and hardware, and audio tutorials demonstrating contemporary recording techniques.

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Problems in the studio? Our team of experts turn audio agony aunts to solve your technical problems

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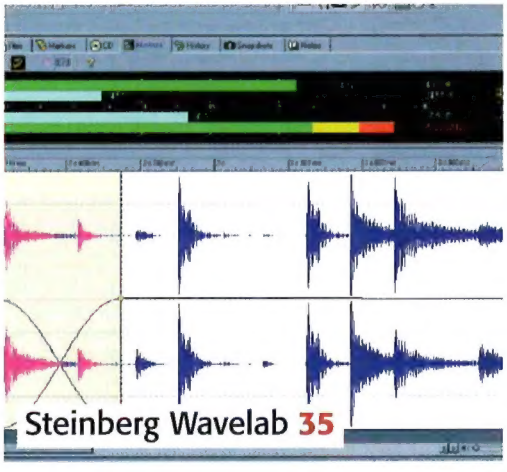
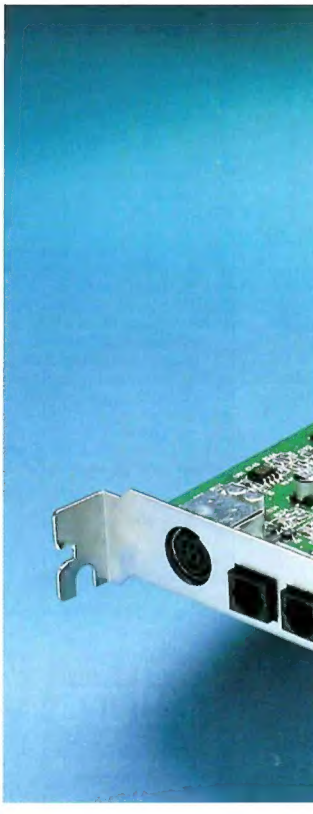
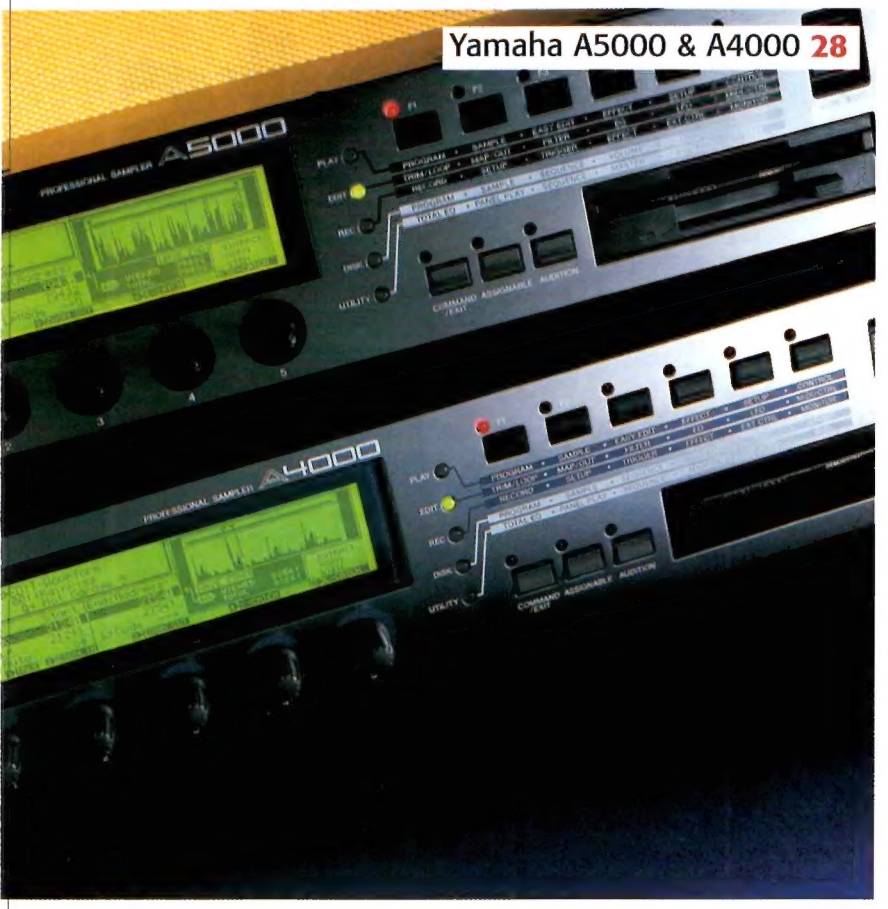
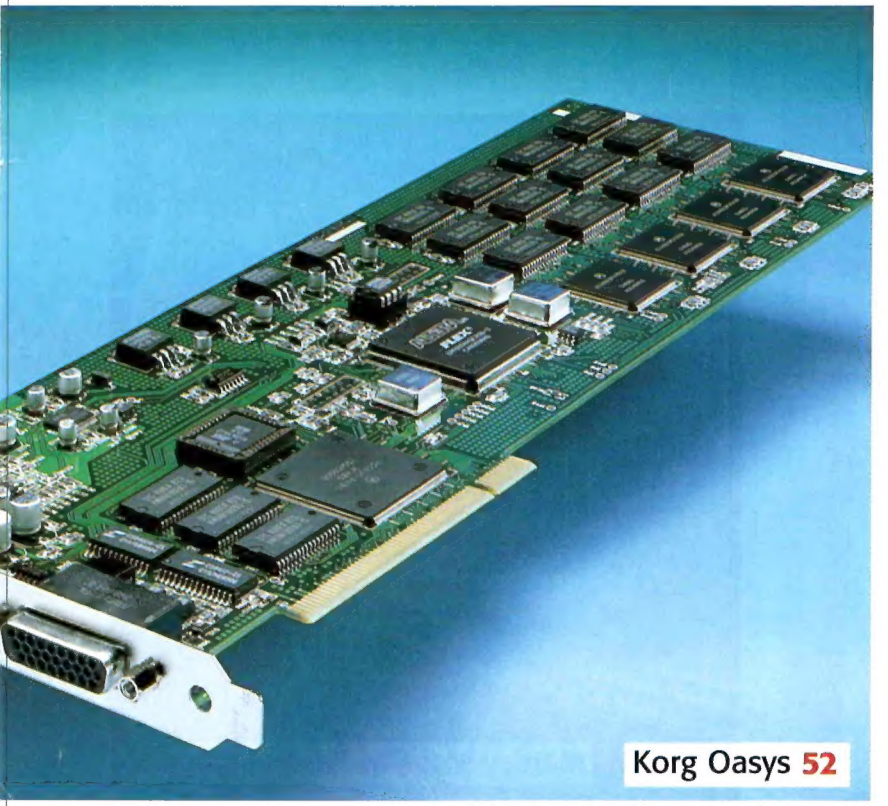

Steinberg Wavelab 35







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The godfathers of the Bristol sound are back with a new album, *Big World, Small World*

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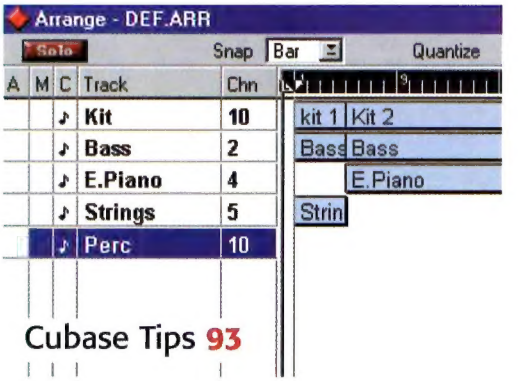


Cubase Tips 93

cd contents

software

track 1

PC

Steinberg Cubase VST p.93
3.7 demo of the popular audio/MIDI sequencer/recorder, to accompany this month's Cubase tutorial.

Steinberg Wavelab 3 p.35
Reviewer Alan Branch reckons it's one of the best wave editors he's seen, but you can make up your own mind by trying the latest Wavelab demo out for yourself...

MAC

Steinberg Cubase VST p.93
4.1 demo of the popular audio/MIDI sequencer/recorder, to accompany this month's Cubase tutorial.

Synchro Arts VocALign p.56
Demo of the AS plug-in that'll sync those pesky backing vocals tighter than the Bee Gees' trousers.

demo of the month

track 2

Einstein's Daughter 'Wonderland' p100
It may be a naff title, but this post trip-hop masterpiece demonstrates this act's songwriting skills to a 'T'.

commercial tracks

tracks 3-7

Tot Taylor* p.64
Five examples of ad supremo Tot Taylor's compositions. The first four are taken from the BBC2 series *Early Travellers In North America*, while the fifth is a cheesetastic jazz number.
track 3 Sparkle Waltz
track 4 Calm Seas
track 5 Sea Sick
track 6 Clip Clop Tune
track 7 Incidentally, Robert
*Tracks 3-7 composed and produced by Tot Taylor. ℗ Poppy Records. Published by Songmatic.

gear demos

track 8

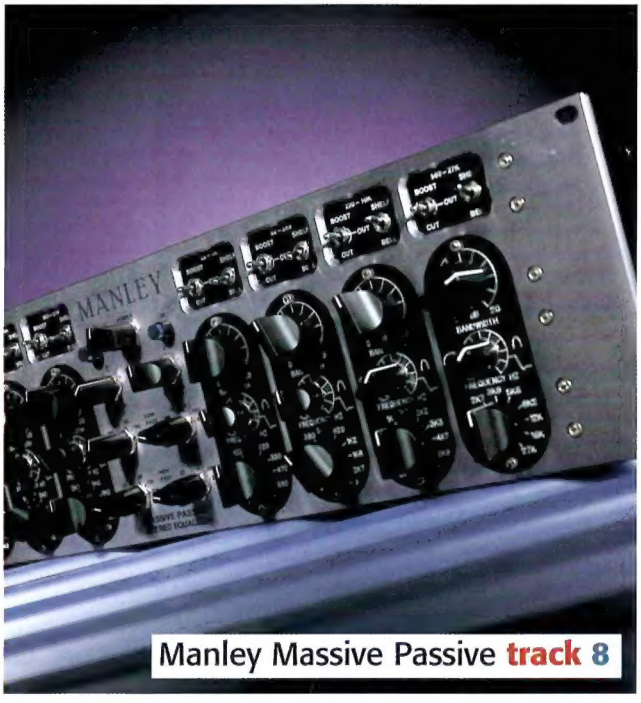
Manley Massive Passive EQ p.40
Check out what Manley's Stereo Tube EQ could do for your drums

tracks 9-10

Sony DRE-S777 p.46
High-quality sampled reverb from Sony's flagship processor
track 9 claps
track 10 acoustic guitar examples

tracks 11-14

Yamaha A4000 and A5000 p.28
Yamaha's new A4000 and A5000 demo tracks show off some of the new samplers' features
track 11 Main demo tune
track 13 Examples of 'Easy Edit'
track 14 Synth FX from the supplied sample library



samples in WAV format on track 1

tracks 15-24
Simon Hanson live dance loops

track 15 141 BPM
(i) Snare groove compressed
(ii) Snare groove dry
(iii) Snare groove flanged
(iv) Snare groove 1/2 compressed
(v) Snare fill/ride compressed
(vi) Snare fill/ride dry
(vii) Snare fill/ride 1/2 compressed
(viii) Snare groove/hat compressed
(ix) Snare groove/hat dry
(x) Snare groove/hat 1/2 compressed

track 16 141 BPM
(i) Two snare ride compressed
(ii) Two snare ride dry
(iii) Two snare ride 1/2 compressed
(iv) Twang snare compressed
(v) Twang snare dry
(vi) Twang snare 1/2 compressed
(vii) Twang variant compressed

track 17 141 BPM
(i) Snare fill compressed
(ii) Snare fill dry
(iii) Snare fill 1/2 compressed
(iv) Paradiddle groove compressed
(v) Paradiddle groove dry
(vi) Paradiddle groove 1/2 compressed
(vii) Ride bounce compressed
(viii) Ride bounce dry
(ix) Ride bounce 1/2 compressed

track 18 141 BPM
(i) Ride fill compressed
(ii) Ride fill dry
(iii) Ride fill 1/2 compressed
(iv) 6/8 snare compressed
(v) 6/8 snare dry
(vi) 6/8 snare 1/2 compressed
(vii) Open hat vibe compressed
(viii) Open hat vibe dry
(ix) Open hat vibe 1/2 compressed

track 19 141 BPM
(i) Cut fill snare compressed
(ii) Cut fill snare dry
(iii) Cut fill snare 1/2 compressed
(iv) Hat snare fill compressed
(v) Hat snare fill dry
(vi) Hat snare fill 1/2 compressed
(vii) Ride groove compressed
(viii) Ride groove dry
(ix) Ride groove 1/2 compressed

track 20 141 BPM
(i) Bass drum fill compressed
(ii) Bass drum fill dry
(iii) Bass drum fill 1/2 compressed
(iv) Ride fill compressed
(v) Ride fill dry
(vi) Ride fill 1/2 compressed
(vii) Groove skip compressed
(viii) Groove skip dry
(ix) Groove skip 1/2 compressed

track 21 141 BPM
(i) 2 Snare step compressed
(ii) 2 Snare step dry
(iii) 2 Snare step 1/2 compressed
(iv) 6/8 Hat snare compressed
(v) 6/8 Hat snare dry
(vi) 6/8 Hat snare 1/2 compressed
(vii) 6/8 fill compressed
(viii) 6/8 fill dry
(ix) 6/8 fill 1/2 compressed

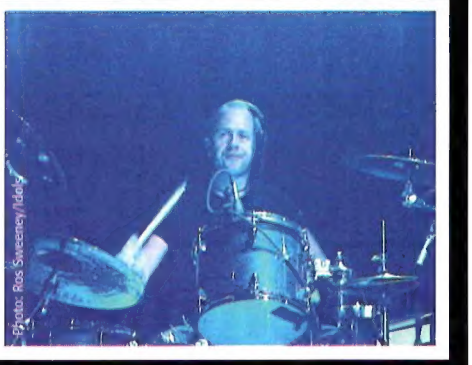
track 22 141 BPM
(i) 1 swing compressed
(ii) 1 swing dry
(iii) 1 swing 1/2 compressed
(iv) Funny 2 snare compressed
(v) Funny snare dry
(vi) Funny snare 1/2 compressed
(vii) 2 snare ride compressed
(viii) 2 snare ride dry
(ix) 2 snare ride 1/2 compressed
(x) 6/8 ride compressed
(xi) 6/8 ride dry
(xii) 6/8 ride 1/2 compressed

track 23 70 BPM
(i) Lo-fi groove
(ii) Lo-fi fill
(iii) Lo-fi bass triplet
(iv) Variant
(v) Variant

track 24 100 BPM
(i) Lo-fi 16 groove dry
(ii) Lo-fi 16 groove compressed
(iii) Variant with fill dry
(iv) Variant with fill compressed
(v) Cut groove dry
(vi) Wah wah flange
(vii) Dry
(viii) Wah distort
(ix) Distortion
(x) Compressed
(xi) EQ
(xii) LFO
(xiii) With reverse

tracks 25-27
Producer/remixer/programmer Alan Branch shows off a little of CreamWare's Pulsar card, with drum loops and analogue-style sequences. Chop and sample to your heart's content...
track 25 Pulsar drum loops
track 26 Pulsar sequences
track 27 Pulsar large sequence

This month's Sound Factory samplist



Simon Hanson
Simon's pro drumming career began in the North of England where he was a member of various club cabaret acts. He eventually moved to London and honed the talents that have been put to use in numerous musical styles. He has played on movie and advertising soundtracks, with pop luminaries such as Grace Jones, Ace of Bass and Hall and Oates, and he can even be heard on Rick Wakeman's latest project with the LSO. Since having his "eyes opened" to the wonders of the studio and dance music, he has joined up with long-time friends and associates Death In Vegas (hear him on their new single 'Aisha') and will be appearing on their forthcoming tour.

Netscape Online

Netscape Online: the free internet service in association with Future Publishing

track 1

Sign up for the new FREE Netscape Online Service, sponsored by Future Publishing and featuring content from Future Publishing's web sites.

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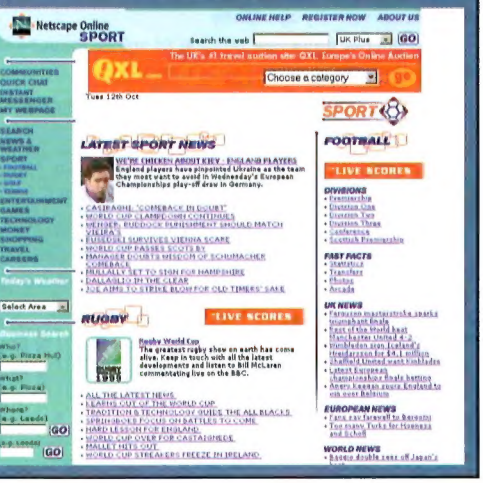


news

If it's new and it's music production, it's here. All the gear, gossip and goings-on from a month in the biz...

Analogue sounds for a new age

Steinberg release two VST synths for Cubase and Logic users

Steinberg have released two virtual synths for VST users. The Model•E and Pro-Five follow hot on the heels of the LM4 drum machine, the first virtual instrument to make use of VST 2.0's plug-in interface.

Model•E is a fully-tweakable 16-way multitimbral polyphonic analogue-style synth capable of deep bass sounds, lead lines and analogue filter sweeps. Simply plug the synth into one of the virtual instrument racks within Cubase VST, and Cubase's MIDI tracks are routed directly to its input. Outputs appear directly in the VST mixer, where effects and EQ can be applied just as with any audio channel. Timing is sample-accurate and Steinberg claim it is 40 times faster than conventional MIDI modules.

The second virtual synth is the Pro-Five. Developed by Native instruments, it's based on the vintage '80s Sequential Circuits Prophet 5. Take a look at some of the tasty features...

Pro-Five: features

- **2 oscillators per voice**
- **Pulse, sawtooth and triangle waveforms**
- **Detune and synchronisation**
- **24dB low-pass filter with resonance and self-oscillation**
- **ADSR envelopes for amplitude and filter**
- **LFO with various modulation options**
- **250 selected classic analogue sounds pre-programmed**
- **50 new sounds programmed by John Bowen**
- **Optional velocity sensitivity**
- **Theoretically unlimited number of voices (dependent on CPU power)**
- **Real-time MIDI parameter control**

And it's not just Cubase VST users who will be able to get the benefit of all this analogue-style madness. The two new synths, as well as the LM4 and ReBirth, will also be available to users of Logic Audio 4.1 on the Mac – this is thanks to Emagic's support of VST2.0 technology and ReWire.

Prices: £149 each
More from: Arbiter
Tel: 0181 970 1909
Web: www.arbitergroup.com

With the Model•E, deep bass sounds, lead lines and analogue-style filter sweeps can be yours

The Pro-Five is based on the vintage '80s Prophet 5 synth

Das monitors ist gut

Monitor manufacturers DAS may not be a household name in the UK, but they have actually been around for about 30 years. Although the US-based company had branched out into sound reinforcement, they recently returned to their studio roots with the development of a new line of compact mid and nearfield monitors for studio and broadcast monitoring, which the company describe as 'surgically accurate'. Two speakers are available so far; the Monitor 6 and Monitor 8; these differ only in the size of their woofers, which are 6.5" and 8" respectively.

Prices: TBA
More from: Sennheiser UK
Tel: 01494 551551
Web: www.sennheiser.co.uk

Features

- **Oversized motor structures and cast aluminium chassis for maximum efficiency**
- **Ultra-fine aluminium tweeter diaphragms**
- **Ferrofluid cooled voice coils**
- **Linear Quadratic Spherical wave guides to enhance vocal transparency**
- **Solid wood side panels for rigidity and minimum panel resonance**

The "surgically accurate" DAS Monitor series

PC recording comes with knobs and faders

Roland launch USB desktop digital studio

Looking for a complete hardware and software solution for recording and editing music on your PC? Roland claim to have the answer in the form of their ED U-8 Digital Studio. Connecting to the computer via one USB cable, the ED U-8 provides a mixer, audio and MIDI interface and a DSP effects processor, and you can wave goodbye to fiddly mouse/keyboard operations thanks to its hands-on faders. The software side of things is covered by a full version of Steinberg's Cubasis VST sequencer and Roland ED's Virtual SoundCanvas software synth.

Price £504
More from: Edirol
Tel: 0845 117 2001
Web: www.edirol.com/europe

Features

- **One track of stereo audio recording**
- **Eight tracks of stereo audio playback**
- **136 types of DSP effects**
- **S/PDIF digital I/O**
- **32, 44.1 and 48kHz input sampling rates**
- **44.1kHz output**
- **MIDI in and out**
- **XLR mic, guitar and line inputs, A and B inputs, headphone socket and footswitch jack**

ED U-8 connects to your computer with one USB cable

in brief

ASIO2 from MOTU

Mark of the Unicorn have released an ASIO2 driver as a free download from their website (www.motu.com). This is for use with the PCI-324 audio hardware including the 2408, 1224, 308 and 24i interfaces. Two new features have been added: hardware monitoring allows for lower latency audio with the MOTU CueMix console, while Sample Accurate synchronisation can now be accomplished with both ADAT and Tascam MDM.

More from: Musictrack
Tel: 01767 313447

Plank in a box

Band-In-A-Box users rejoice: PG Music have just released their Master Solo Series of MIDI guitar files. They come in two flavours: Master Jazz Solos and Master Flatpick Solos. All come with complete band arrangements for bass, drums, piano and guitar – all prepared with the student in mind.

More from: Arbiter
Tel: 0181 970 1909
Web: www.arbitergroup.com

Future Music

The March issue of *Future Music* features the world's first review of the RSS DarkStar synth, which provides amazing easy-to-use power at a ridiculous price. There's also a head-to-head test between the Yamaha SU700 and Roland SP-808 loop samplers, interviews with Laika, DJ Spooky & Scanner and Dan Curtin, plus a beginners' guide to MIDI and the last in their series on electronic music history, with a look at the events and main players of the '80s and '90s. Be there!

FM enters the heart of darkness...

in brief

Oh, be quiet

Platinum-selling kilt wearers Texas are continuing to reinforce the Neumann way of thinking. The band exclusively used a wide range of Neumann mics on their current hit album *The Hush*. Singer Sharleen Spiteri was impressed: "I've used many different microphones for performing live, but when it comes to recording it has to be Neumann". Mics used were the M149, U87 and the new TLM103, all in different combinations.

More from: Sennheiser UK
Tel: 01494 551551
Web: www.sennheiser.co.uk

It's a Neumann for Sharleen

All change

Online retailers and auctioneers Futuresounds are changing their name. The internet-only company are set to re-emerge as Dolphin Music. This is good news for some, as the company is now able to standardise all business operations under their new moniker.

Web: www.dolphinmusic.co.uk

Cedar show off

Audio restoration gurus Cedar Audio will be showing off the latest processes for their Cedar for Windows real-time system at this month's Paris AES show. Also on display will be the Series X and Series X+ range of rackmount modules, designed to complement the existing Declicker, Decrackler and Dehisser.

More from: Cedar Audio
Tel: 01223 414117
Web: www.cedar-audio.com

Quality sound for the net-bound

Arboretum release mastering plug-in for web audio

While thousands of artists and music producers have embraced the internet music revolution as the perfect medium to get their sound directly to the masses, the issue of sound quality continues to be a problem.

Step in Arboretum with their Realizer Pro, a Direct X/VST mastering plug-in for net-bound audio. Realizer Pro expands the stereo image, adds missing low end, and synthesizes overtones that have been lost to data compression.

Price: £75
More from: Unity Audio
Tel: 01440 785843
Web: www.arboretum.com

Features:
Realizer Pro
- **EQ**
- **Reverb**
- **Loudness**
- **Bass Maximiser**
- **Stereo Enhancer**
- **Harmonic Exciter**

Get your sound to the masses without losing it

on the net

Wot – no advance?

Unwilling to share your profits with record companies? Check out timmol.com, the independent music marketing website for musicians. They offer a completely self-contained area within their website for any artist to sell and promote their music. Managing director Steve Doyle said: "We are not about exclusivity, we are about giving a fair chance to all of the musicians and artists out there who want to sell their music."
More from: www.timmol.co.uk

Yellowsheep join the flock

Yellowsheep.net are the latest to join the internet music marketing craze. This non-profit making organisation offer what they describe as an "easy to use and free" service to enable you to upload your music onto the web "without the normal hassle that may be associated with similar sites". Your own homepage is also part of the bargain. All webpages are registered free of charge, and take in 99.9% of all search engines.
More from: www.yellowsheep.net

Korg download update

If you're looking to update the operating systems on your Korg gear, then check out the recently (and continually) updated Korg UK website. Latest additions are the new operating systems for; N1, N1R, N5, N5EX, NS5R keyboards and rack units, plus others too numerous to list.
More from: www.korg.co.uk

Websites offering to put your music on the net are breeding like er... sheep

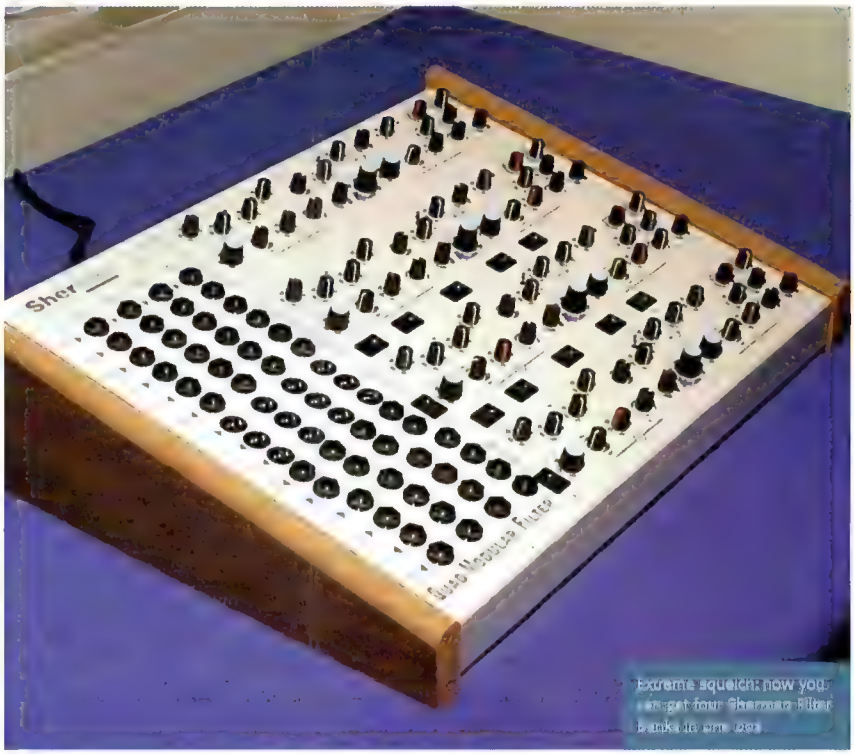
Ultimate sound abuse

We all love quality gear, and who doesn't love a certain er… 'exclusivity', shall we say? Well, a few lucky people on God's earth will soon be taking delivery of the new, improved and eminently squelchy Sherman QMF – or Quad Modular Filter.

Yes indeed, the people who gave us the Sherman Filter Bank are producing this monster filter unit, containing no less than four original Filter Banks, all laid out in an attractive, retro-style, desk-top box for the ultimate in sound abuse. But if you want one, best get your name down ASAP – the QMF is strictly limited, and only 100 units will be rolling off the factory assembly line.

Billed as 'the strongest and most extreme filter on the planet,' the QMF is fully MIDI-controllable, with four separate audio-inputs for the four banks, or they can be linked in series for some serious action. There are also ten extra functions allied to banks 3 & 4, giving rise to more performance-related high-jinks, such as brightness, input-distortion limiter and 5x faster ADSR speeds than a regular Filter Bank.

Price: £2,349
More from: Funky Junk
Tel: 0207 609 5479
Web: www.funky-junk.com



Extreme squelch: now you can get four Sherman Filter banks in one go

Session's little helpers

Back in issue 68 we reviewed Terrasonde's innovative Audio Toolbox. Previously only available in its compact hand-held form, the 'Box is now available in a 2U 19" rackmounted version. All connectors are conveniently located on the front panel, and the unit comes complete with a microphone, windscreen and 2m cable as well as PC and Mac interface cables. As with the hand-held model, a comprehensive set of audio tools for analytical and test functions are on offer.

Price: £1,522
More from: Rocky Road Distribution Ltd.
Tel: 01494 535333
Web: www.terrasonde.com

Audio Toolbox comes with session helpers, including a guitar tuner and tempo computer

in brief

Set and match

Sony have launched a new speaker management system that enables engineers to 'set and forget' crossover and level settings for complex multi-speaker set-ups. The SRP-F300 can be controlled via a PC interface and provides up to three stereo or six individually-configured speaker outputs from a single stereo pair of inputs.

More from: Sony
Tel: 01256 355011
Web: www.pro.sony-europe.com

Sample this

There's a new sample CD for users of E-mu's Eos/Ultra samplers. *Techno Synth Construction Yard* has been created by European sound designer Rob Papen and contains synth, techno and ambient sounds, drum loops and FX.

More from: E-mu
Tel: 0131 653 6556
Web: www.emu.com

Computer Music

April's edition of our sister mag *Computer Music* brings you a little piece of soft synth heaven. As well as exclusive reviews of the latest Steinberg VST 2 instruments, Pro-Five and Model•E (see our news story on page 8), they've got a beginner's guide to analogue synthesis and a ton of free soft synths on the CD. Don't miss it.

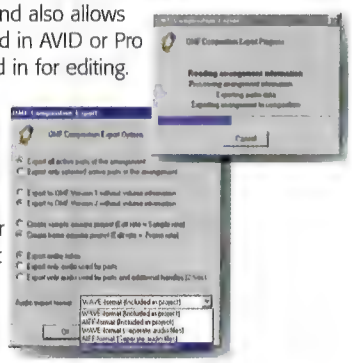
Digital Village expands

Pro audio retailers Digital Village will be holding a number of special events to mark the opening of four new shops around Britain. Previously Music Connections sites, the new shops will be launched on February 29 in Bristol, Birmingham, Southampton and Ashwell (Herts). Forthcoming events will include Pro Tools workshops and previews of Mackie's new HDR24 digital 24-bit recorder.

More from: Digital Village
Web: www.digitalvillage.co.uk

OMF for Soundscape

Software that allows users to export a Soundscape project as an OMF file to any removable media or to systems that support OMF1 or OMF2 files such as Pro Tools, Fairlight or Sadie, is now available to Soundscape users in plug-in form. The OMFI Import/Export plug-in is available for the R.Ed Recorder Editor and SSHDR1-Plus editing systems, and also allows any project created in AVID or Pro Tools to be loaded in for editing. The OMF Import/Export function is included in the Soundscape EDL processor (free for existing users) but can also be purchased separately.



Prices:
Soundscape EDL processor package: £750
OMFI Import/Export software only: £400
More from: Soundscape
Tel: 01222 540333
Web: www.soundscape-digital.com

Free VST plug-in synth

Muon Software is a new company dedicated to producing high-quality low-cost audio software for PC musicians. Previously known for their freeware Buzz Tracker plug-ins, the company are now concentrating on commercial releases. To celebrate their move out of the garage, they are making their Atom synth available for free download from their website until the end of April.

The Atom is an 8-voice analogue-sounding polyphonic synth that slots into an instrument rack within VST. It features two oscillators per voice, a 24dB per octave low-pass filter with resonance, sample accurate response to MIDI events and 64-bit internal processing.

Other Muon releases for VST are the Electron synth, featuring three oscillators, and the Neutron analogue-modelled drum machine.

More from: Muon Software
Web: www.muon-software.com

recording in progress

Teenage Fanclub are currently self-producing their new album at Rockfield studios.

[illegible] are currently remixing a [illegible] studios in South Wales.

KTC are hard at work co producing their new album at Rockfield with Nick Davies.

Blackwood's best, the Manic Street Preachers, are currently demoing new material with producer Dave Eringa.

Placebo are working on their new album at Olympic Studios with Paul Corkett producing

Noel Gallagher faves, [illegible] Radio One Wales. [illegible] Richmond is producing.

DJ Rap is in pre-production for her second album, which she is co-producing with Aidan Love at his own studio

[illegible] are holed up at Roundhouse working on their next No.1.

Roundhouse is also currently playing host to songsmiths Travis, who are busy working on B-sides.

Mike Nielsen is working on surround-sound DVD mixes with dance darlings Underworld at The Strongroom.

Current indie pop faves co.uk are recording their album at Rockfield with Hugh Jones at the controls.

Eden is currently playing host to Push while they mix tracks with producers Ian Green and Steps

Currently recording the follow-up to *OK Computer*, Radiohead are at a secret location with producer [illegible]

cut here

This drum machine contains a whole range of drum sounds, and various functions to let you manipulate them. Use it to create complex loops and patterns, or just play around and watch the lights flicker.

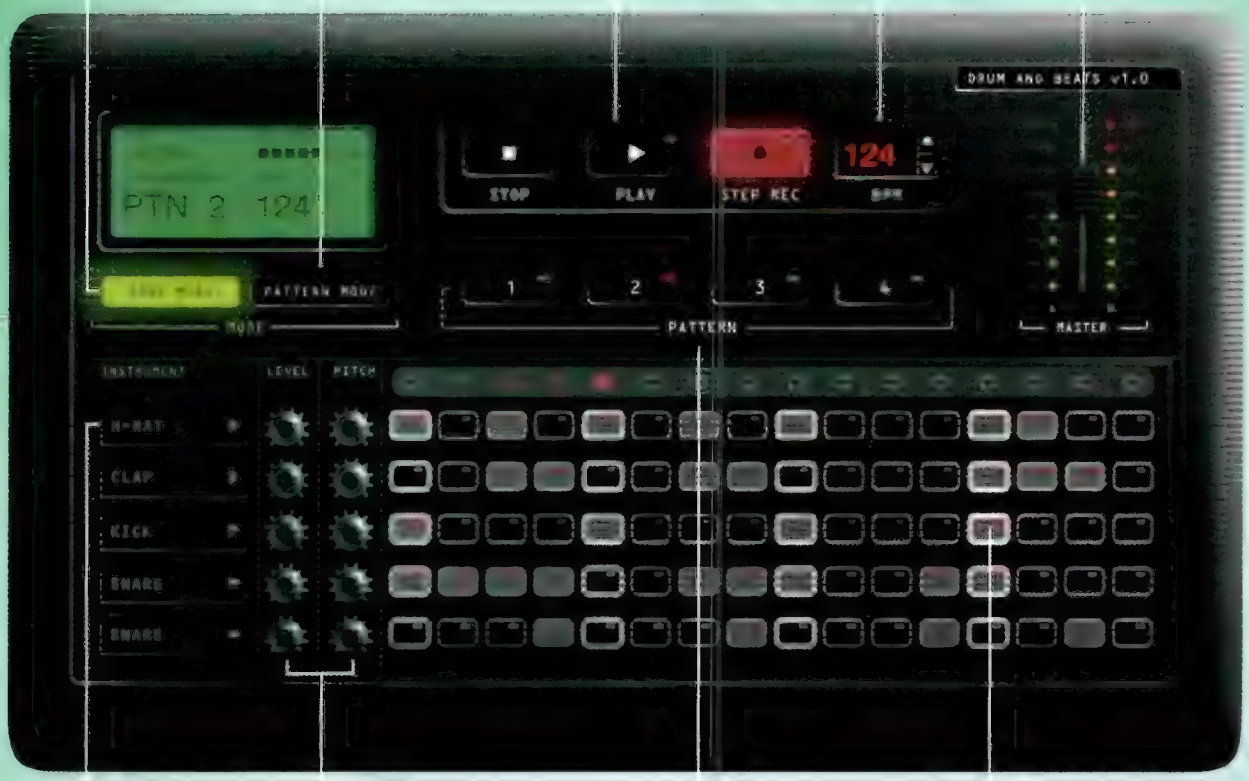
Song mode
Plays through the four beats stored in the pattern banks one after another in a continuous loop.

Stop/Play/Step Rec buttons
Stop, play or put the drum machine into record mode.

Pattern mode
In this mode the drum machine loops through the pattern selected in the pattern bank.

BPM
Sets the tempo of the drum pattern in beats per minute, from slow and mellow to drum 'n' bass.

Master volume fader
Move this up and down, plug in your speakers and hear the results.



Instrument select button
Select the drum sounds with this button.

Drum beat switches
These switches activate the different drum sounds you have selected. Each separate switch represents a subdivision of the rhythm, with four subdivisions per beat.

Level/Pitch controls
Adjust the individual volume and pitch of each drum sound with these dials.

Pattern bank
Save up to four drum beats in the four pattern banks. Click on play and then on the different pattern bank buttons to switch between beats, or switch to song mode to play each stored drum beat one after the other. If this sounds complicated that's because it is. This tool is industry standard.

Drums and rhythm: Create the backbone of your music online.

This is just one of the tools BT gives you at getoutthere.bt.com, a site dedicated to helping unsigned musicians fulfil their potential. Keep this guide and you can use it when you get to the site.

getoutthere.bt.com BT

Platinum Mixmaster

New sibling for Tone Factory, Voicemaster and Compounder

Focusrite's new Platinum Mixmaster: it's compressor, EQ, limiter and stereo image controller will put that final sheen on your tracks

Focusrite have announced a fourth addition to their Platinum range of processors. A 2U rack-mounting stereo unit designed to to be the final processing stage when mixing, Mixmaster features a spectral compressor, 3-band equalizer, limiter and stereo image controller. Mixmaster will be launched at LA's NAMM show, and should be in the shops sometime in March.

Price: TBC
More from: Focusrite Audio Engineering
Tel: 01494 462246
Web: www.focusrite.com

Features

- Stereo line input
- Stereo expander
- Stereo multiband (spectral) compressor
- Stereo 3-band parametric equalizer
- Stereo image controller
- Stereo limiter
- Optional 24-bit/96kHz digital output stage

Trident missiles launched

In issue 71 we brought you news about the resurgence of Trident. It now appears that the two separate companies involved with the new products are not exactly seeing eye-to-eye over the use of the prestigious Trident name.

In the blue corner is Malcolm Toft, owner, founder and managing director of the original Trident Audio (Developments) Ltd. In a partnership with JoeMeek's Ted Fletcher, Toft is releasing products under the name Trident-MTA. And in the red corner stands former Trident designer John Oram, who is using the moniker Trident Audio Ltd.

A statement released by JoeMeek stated, "Malcolm Toft has not made any arrangements or given any permissions for his personal and intellectual copyrights to be used or copied by any other manufacturer. It must be understood that any imitation or use of original Trident designs made by other companies is unauthorised and is likely to be challenged". So there it is; looks like handbags at dawn.

In a further twist, it turns out that the actual 'Trident' trademark is owned by a company in Mexico...

What's in a name? John Oram's Producer Box will be released under the name of Trident Audio Ltd.

HHB CIRCLE

STUDIO MONITORS

ACADEMY OF SOUND
Stoke on Trent Tel: 01782 205100

ANDERTONS MUSIC CO
Guildford Tel:.01483 456777

DAWSONS
Warrington Tel: 01925 632591

DIGITAL VILLAGE
Barnet Tel: 0181 440 3440

DIGITAL VILLAGE
Croydon Tel: 0181 407 8444

DIGITAL VILLAGE
London W3 Tel: 0181 992 5592

EDDIE MOORS MUSIC
Bournemouth Tel: 01202 395135

GIGSOUND
London SW16 Tel: 0181 769 5681

THE GUITAR & AMP CENTRE
Brighton Tel: 01273 676835

THE M CORPORATION
Nottingham Tel: 0115 947 4070

THE M CORPORATION
Ringwood, Hampshire Tel: 01425 470007

MUSICAL EXCHANGES
Birmingham Tel: 0121 236 7544

MUSICAL EXCHANGES
Coventry Tel: 01203 635766

MUSIC VILLAGE
Romford Tel: 0181 598 9955

MUSIC VILLAGE
Cambridge Tel: 01223 324536

PROJECT MUSIC
Hounslow Tel: 0181 570 4444

Q MUSIC
Birmingham Tel: 0121 643 4655

SAPPHIRES
London NW2 Tel: 0181 450 0318

SERIOIUS AUDIO
London N1 Tel: 0171 609 3999

SOUND DIVISION
London WC1 Tel: 0171 637 9498

SOUNDS LIVE
Newcastle Tel: 0191 230 3422

ROSE MORRIS
London WC2 Tel: 0171 836 9741

TURNKEY
London WC2 Tel: 0171 379 5655

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Visit HHB on line at http://www.hhb.co.uk

THE RUMOURS ARE ALL TRUE

HHB CIRCLE

Accurate. Revealing. Detailed. Untiring.

HHB Circle Studio Monitors deliver the best-value monitoring solutions in the business.

And the good news is spreading fast.

Just one session was all it took for the legendary musician Mick Fleetwood to standardise on Circle monitors for his studios in London, Los Angeles and Hawaii. **"When I heard that detailed, robust bottom end, I said: 'I love them. Where can I get a pair?'"**

Reviewing the Circle 5s, Pro Audio Review concluded **"Detail, clarity, off-axis response and imaging are superb... definitely give the HHB Circle 5s a listen"** while Audio Media said of the Circle 3s **"I fell in love with the active pair as soon as I plugged them in... the Circle 3s sang out loud and proud with a reassuring kick in the gut providing enough bass, while remaining accurate."**

So what are you waiting for? Get your ears down to the nearest HHB dealer and check out Circle monitors today.

Above (left to right): HHB Circle 5 midfield monitor (active and passive versions available), HHB Circle 1 powered sub-woofer, HHB Circle 3 nearfield monitor (active and passive versions available).

Left: Mick Fleetwood with HHB Circle 5 active midfield monitors and Circle 1 powered sub-woofer.

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HHB

FIRST WE LISTEN

Hear the light

Sick of crossovers? DJs and producers have now bleedin' gone and started to create art! But prepare to open your mind and check out the latest exhibition at MOMA – er, that's the one in Oxford, not New York. Celebrating the link between light and sound, Audible Light features six installations by eight international architects, artists and performers. The exhibition is all about experimenting with artificially produced sound and light – electricity being used with the same discipline as a painter might use his/her paints.

Swede Carl Michael von Hausswolff is typical of the artists on show. Producer, publisher and musician amongst other things, von Hausswolff applies modern sound technology to his work. Bruce Gilbert and Graham Lewis, ex-members of the influential post-punk band Wire (busy recording, writing and performing music in the studio) are also exhibiting. Described as 'sonic experimenters' and performance artists, they will be producing a new work for the exhibition. So get yourself down to Oxford and check out the ways in which sound technology can be applied to the arts.

Audible Light – An Exhibition of Sound and Light is open until 19th March.

More from: MOMA
Tel: 01865 722733

Take two

Names like Nova and Supernova can't really be bettered (although Vauxhall might say otherwise), so Novation have named their new synths Nova II and Supernova II. The new models are a departure from their rack-mount and desktop predecessors, coming as they do in keyboard form.

The Supernova II comes in three guises – standard, Pro and Pro-X and is billed as a 'musician's dream', with the control surface featuring a massive 43 knobs, eight sliders, 135 switches, and a 61-note semi-weighted keyboard. The three models have 24, 36 or 48 voices respectively (all upgradeable to 48), each voice comprising three oscillators, a noise source and two ring modulators, while a modulation matrix offers over 130 possible routings. The usual Novation-style trimmings are naturally onboard – including FX, filtering, vocoding and analogue inputs. Eight analogue outputs are provided, and an optional digital I/O board.

The Nova II standard, X and XL are cut-down versions of their big brothers, and also come exclusively as keyboard versions.

Prices: Nova II from £1,149
Supernova II from £1,499
More from: Novation
Tel: 01628 828888
Web: www.novationuk.com

M·ONE
DUAL EFFECTS PROCESSOR

BEHIND THE EXTERIOR OF THIS COOL REVERB
– lie more than 20 years of know-how & experience in supplying solutions for demanding audio professionals.

MAIN FEATURES
- 20 incredible TC effects: Reverb, Chorus, Tremolo, Pitch, Delay, Dynamics...
- Analog-style User Interface
- Presets: 100 Factory/100 User
- Dual-Engine™ design
- 24 bit A/D-D/A converters
- S/PDIF digital I/O, 44.1-48kHz
- 1/4" Jacks - Dual I/O
- 24 bit internal processing

WHY YOU WANT TO...
- Run two of the best sounding Reverbs or other quality effects simultaneously, without compromising sound
- Have more flexibility to create cool quality effects
- Have instant control of all vital parameters right at your fingertips
- Shortly put: Get right down to the business of making music instead of wasting time programming

YOU MUST CHECK OUT THIS MACHINE INSTANTLY!

D·TWO
MULTITAP RHYTHM DELAY

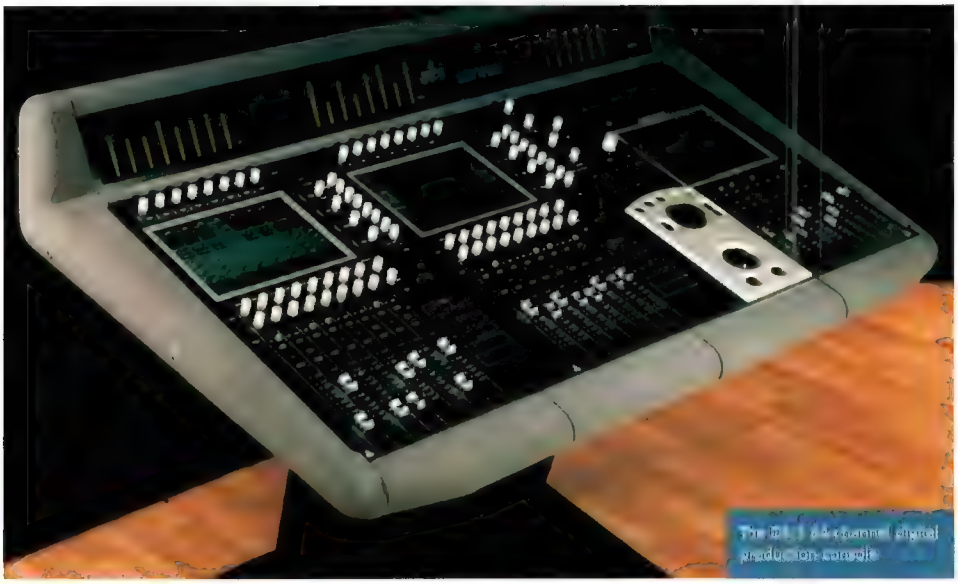
BASED ON THE CLASSIC TC 2290 DELAY
– TC introduces direct tap-in of actual rhythmical patterns as well as control of exact number of repeats and their duration.

MAIN FEATURES
- Multitap Rhythm Delay
- Absolute Repeat Control
- Up to 10 seconds of Delay
- Presets: 50 Factory/100 User
- 24 bit A/D-D/A converters
- S/PDIF digital I/O, 44.1-48kHz
- 1/4" Jacks - Dual I/O
- 24 bit internal processing

SIX UNIQUE DIRECT-ACCESS FEATURES...
- SPATIAL - Experience extra wide delay with a single keystroke
- PING-PONG - Pick any of five patterns and set the relationship between Panning speed and Delay tempo
- REVERSE - Reverse Delay with the flick of a key
- DYNAMIC - Set release time and threshold to let the Input signal control the level of Delay - keeping everything nice and tidy
- CHORUS - Or perhaps you prefer Flanger? Hit one key and you've instantly added it to your Delay
- FILTER - Increase filtering as repeats decay

New digital consoles

Soundtracs' new desk comes with touch-screen technology



Soundtracs have a couple of new digital products on the market. The DS-3 is a new 64-channel digital production console incorporating touch-screen technology in conjunction with 25 motorised faders. Each channel has 4-band equalisation and dynamics sections and there are 32 output busses, each with limiters for stereo, LCRS and 5.1 formatting.

Based on the architecture of the DS-3 mixer is the DS-M, a Digital Audio Workstation with a fully-featured 64-channel mixer, integrated with a 24 or 32-track SADIE random access audio editor incorporating video playback for post-production.

Prices: **from £40,000**
More from: **Soundtracs**
Tel: **0208 388 5000**
Web: **www. soundtracs.com**

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Feel the pulse...

CreamWare's Pulsar now has a new sampler, drum machine, equaliser, sequencer and even a Transient Designer

CreamWare have released a clutch of new goodies for their Pulsar/Scope card. We reviewed the Pulsar – which is based on the bold idea of building a studio on a card full of DSP – back in issue 67. Apart from HD recording, it has over 20 synths, Akai-compatible sample players, a fully-fledged synth module on a par with the highly-respected Nord modular, effects and even a mixing desk.

Joining this lot is a bumper pack of new releases. The STS 4000 is a sampler that would give a decent Akai a run for its money, while the SB 404 Synthesizer/Step-Sequencer is a brand-new sounding synth with enough functions to fill this page. Arpeg 01 and 02 are new MIDI arpeggiators, and there's a new 31-band graphic EQ and an EDS 161 drum machine. And just to finish you off (in case you weren't already impressed) there's the virtual Transient Designer – if you still haven't experienced this machine, you're missing out on one of the best products we have seen in the past year.

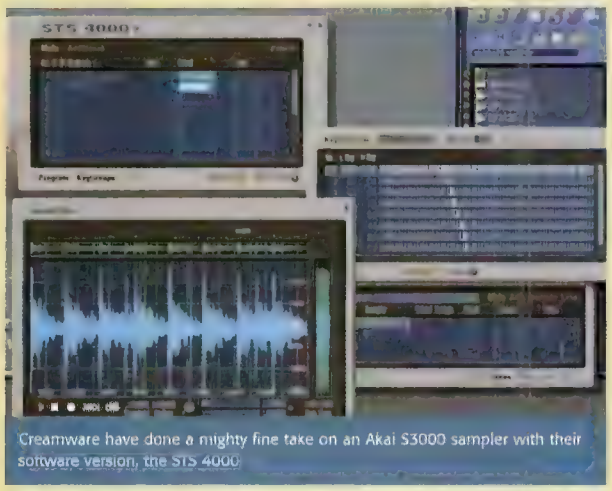
Pulsar's free 1.3 update also includes some new modules. These are eight new effects (FB Chorus A+B, Decimator Mono+Stereo, Ring Modulator, Multiflanger, Mono+Stereo Insert Rack) and 18 new Modular modules.

STS 4000

Continuing their tradition of playing on well-known names for their own devices comes CreamWare's closest sampler yet to a real Akai: the STS 4000 (£253). With more or less every page from the classic Akai 3000, a latency of only 1-2 ms, and the ability to import/export Akai S1000 and S3000, Soundfont, WAV, and AIFF files, this has got be one of the best soft samplers we've seen.

Additional features: STS 4000

- Stereo sampling with up to 24-bit/96kHz, resampling function
- Save, load and organise sample libraries on the PC's hard disk
- Comprehensive editor for sample-accurate editing, with insert-chain



Creamware have done a mighty fine take on an Akai S3000 sampler with their software version, the STS 4000

For DirectX effects

- Keygroup editing, velocity-switch, velocity-crossfade
- Filter with resonance
- Multi-mode with 16 programs
- Stereo out + 16 individual outputs
- Polyphony (depending on the host CPU: >20 stereo voices with PII 400)

CD info

tracks 25-27

Check out the power of Pulsar with these trancey loops created specially for *The Mix* by Alan Branch

SB 404

The SB 404 (£82) is a synthesizer/step-sequencer all-in-one wonder. Take two morphing oscillators, mix with a noise generator, together with a powerful filter section including comb filtering, resonance, independent amp and filter envelopes, and finish with some modulation options. Integrate an effects section including distortion, equaliser, chorus and a stereo delay that is tempo-MIDI clockable. Then just to be different, add a real-time 32-pattern step sequencer.

The SB404 synth/step sequencer: has oscillators, a noise generator, comb filtering, modulation and more...

Using a track-type basis, notes, pitch modulation, volume, filter frequencies, control pan position, or the decay times of the two envelopes can all be controlled over a 16-step pattern – a recipe certainly to whet many appetites – with sync possible from external MIDI clock. Check out tracks 25-27 on this month's cover CD to hear some groovy sounds.

Transient Designer

Using SPL's 'Differential Envelope Technology', the Transient Designer allows threshold-independent dynamic processing to control attack and sustain of audio signals.

CreamWare now have two affordable

Two affordable versions of SPL's Transient Designer technology are now available for Pulsar

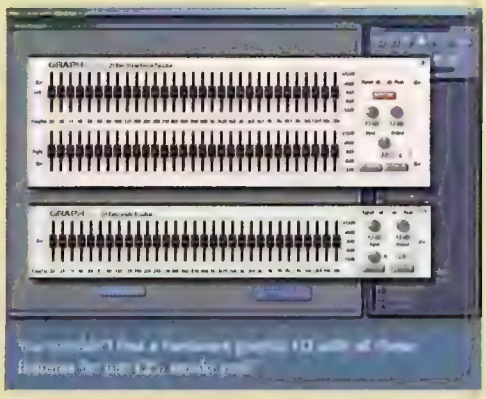
versions of the Transient Designer technology. The Attacker module (£43) incorporates just the attack part for adding that extra punch, while the Transient Designer module (£158) offers both increase and decrease of attack and sustain for adding punch while removing reverb – fantastic for altering loops. Giving simultaneous processing of four audio channels, it's awesome.

Arpeg 01/02

The new Arpeg 01 (£12) and Arpeg 02 (£25) devices are, you guessed it, MIDI arpeggiators, offering different output patterns (Fwd, Rev, Fwd-Rev, Random with adjustable depth). Added features include an LFO for modulating the output, a Sweep Transpose feature and adjustable note length. You can also shift an arpeggio up the keyboard as it plays without changing its harmonic value. Many more options allow for virtually unlimited variations.

With the Arpeg 02, you can change most settings while the arpeggiator is running. As such, it's optimised for live use but is just as useful in the studio.

Graph EQ



A 31-band graphic equaliser comes in both mono and stereo versions, including adjustable I/O with signal and peak LEDs with MIDI control. Show us a hardware version that has that for £25, and we'll eat our hats.

EDS 16I

While limited in sounds, the included EDSI 8 drum machine is on a par with any classic 909 or 808 – except that it has more bass! Now it has a big brother, the EDS 16I (£44). This includes 16 separate outs (in Pulsar) for routing through your favourite effects and seven different sound parameter for each drum. With 20 different drum sets, it's certainly an extreme virtual drum synth.

On the Pulsar website you'll find an ever-increasing page of freeware/shareware module devices to download, (each one not more than 1Mb, which has to say something about the clever design of the system). We expanded our Pulsar with realistic-looking VU meters, mad FX boxes and even two well-featured samplers.

And finally, the advancement of EASI drivers with Emagic and Creamware continues, making the Pulsar's DSP resources available to Logic users. This is a match made in native-techno-heaven. All of the new options are available from the CreamWare online store: http://shop.creamware.de /Shop/Asp/Shop.asp?LG=US

Prices: **see above**
More from: **CreamWare**
Tel: **(49) 2241-5958-0**
Web: **www.creamware.com**

OMNIRAX
STUDIO FURNITURE
A wide range of furniture solutions is available for Yamaha 02R and 03D, Mackie D8 and 24/32 analogue, Spirit 328, and Behringer mixers, DigiDesign ProTools and ProControl and a variety of computer and keyboard workstations. Omnirax will provide a clean, uncluttered installation solution to make your working environment functional, comfortable and stress-free. Full technical brochure available free on request.

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audio distributor info@audioagency.co.uk

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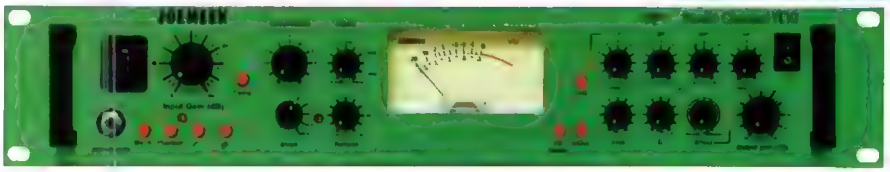
www.omnirax.com

Tracking: the JoeMeek way

JoeMeek – who won't rest until every rack on the planet has a splash of green in it – are launching the VC1Q Studio Channel for tracking and mixing applications. Essentially an upgrade to their popular VC1, the VC1Q adds more features, making their recording front-end even more flexible than it once was.

The unit features some of the best bits of the JoeMeek range, with the usual photo-optical compressor, an enhancer/de-esser that adds or removes sparkle and presence, and the biggest addition to the new processor, an EQ section in the style of the MeEQualiser. The VC1Q also has space for a digital board, giving the option of 24-bit outputs on S/PDIF, coupled to a 3-way switch to select 44.1, 48 or 96kHz sample rate.

Price: VC1Q £549
Digital board £149
More from: JoeMeek
Tel: 01626 333948
Web: www.joemeek-uk.com



The JoeMeek VC1Q – a studio channel for mixing and tracking applications

Top of the class

Studios 301 in Australia has just relocated and re-opened after a takeover and £3.5m refit. Established in 1926, the studio itself is now situated in two separate locations. The recording facility in Alexandria boasts three 48-track studios and two 24-track digital/MIDI studios, while the mastering duties are divided between three studios based in downtown Sydney.

The new owner, SAE Technology College director Tom Misner, has high hopes for the complex. He commented: "This takeover will return Studios 301 to its rightful position as a dominant force in the Australian music industry. We will soon have a true world-class studio facility in Australia."

Studios 301
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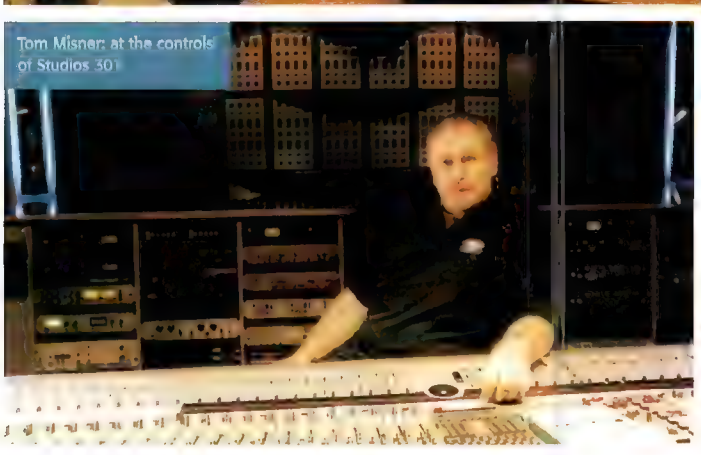
www.301.com.au


Tom Misner: at the controls of Studios 301

Looking good...

Subscribers to *The Mix*, have we got a treat for you! As of next month, the UK's No. 1 Music Production Magazine will arrive on your doorstep bearing a limited-edition, photo-only cover. As well as looking ultra-cool, these issues are bound to be much sought-after in years to come. If you're not already a subscriber, what are you waiting for? Turn to page 95 for details on how to get in on this special deal, and not only will you save money, but your collection of *The Mix* will look better than ever.

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sound bites

Don't just sit there reading and fuming. Write to *Open Mic* and join in our furious debates on the hottest topics of the day…

Valve values
'Valve warmth' is a phrase often bandied about in audio circles. Is the whole concept a marketing ploy, or do valves actually make a sonic difference?

DIY
We want to hear from readers who have bypassed the traditional A&R/record company route. Have you fallen or flourished in the world of self-promotion? Share your experiences with *Open Mic*…

Go get 'im!
Barry White from New Zealand wrote in this month to say that the North American music scene is leaving the UK behind. True or false?

Write to us:
***Open Mic*, *The Mix*,**
Future Publishing,
30 Monmouth St,
Bath, England
BA1 2BW

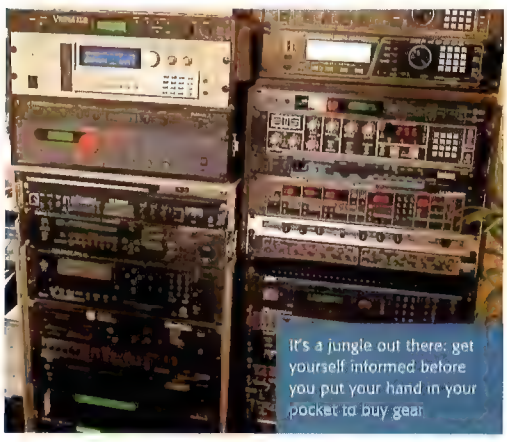
Or email us:
themix@futurenet.co.uk

(Un)easy money

Ten tears ago I was kind of up with the latest keyboard technology, owning a DX7, D70, Prophet 2000 and a Crumar Trilogy. I was not really interested in the home recording world. I have now had a PC for nine months, subscribed to *The Mix* and read other Future Publishing mags and have built up, what I feel, is a very satisfying and hi-tech home studio. I run Logic Audio Gold on a 13Gb Tiny PC with a Gina soundcard and have a JV 2080, Alesis DM5 and Octava mic going through a Zoom 1201 and Mackie 1202 VLZ Pro desk. So no problems to report as yet!

But the joy/hassle of purchasing these items has not been easy for someone who has had to adapt to the steep learning curve of the studio world. My problem (have others found this?) is this: when do you know enough to feel happy parting with anything up to £1,100? I knew nothing about the inside of a PC, so when I tried to fit an ISIS card that needs two PCI slots I had to return it as I found I had only one available slot. I exchanged it for a Gina, as the shop assistant advised of its quality and reputability. Now I can make good recordings, but I can't record more than two parts at once. So no live drums. Do I now need to part-ex this for a Wave/8.24 or Arc 88? I bought a mic (to use on Logic's internal mixer) and was told it needed phantom power, so had to buy a standalone mixer.

Now you might say 'silly sod, read up.' Well I did. I am continuing to increase my knowledge and have upgraded Logic to V4 (with all those lovely plug-ins reported by no less than three different magazines). My point is, however, you could spend months – as I did – analysing articles, getting reputable music shops' advice and asking friends already using the gear. How many times do you shift horses between Logic/Cubase, Alesis/Boss, Mackie/Behringer and the like, and when do you commit the readies? Having got all that off my chest, it still continues to be an immense labour of love!



It's a jungle out there: get yourself informed before you put your hand in your pocket to buy gear

Ian Stephenson, by email

I suppose buying recording kit is like buying anything else – you need to be informed as possible before putting your hand in your pocket… only with recording and hi-tech gear, you need to be even more informed than ever. Obviously we can only give general advice here, but there are always two simple questions to ask: firstly, what do you want to achieve with the equipment you intend to buy, and secondly, does the product you're about to buy fulfil your needs?

Hopefully the answer to the first question is fairly easy (but make sure you know exactly what you want to do, rather than just having a vague idea). The second question needs some research. Find out what the retailer has to say/offer, but don't leave it there. Often a retailer may have specific models that they have in stock, and want to sell, so may point you in this direction even if there's another model that better suits your needs. So, make sure you read magazine reviews, ask any muso friends you have, check on the web, and explore any other ways you can think of of getting info on a product. Hopefully after all this, you'll have a fighting chance of buying something that'll do exactly what you want it to.

Chris Kempster

Fight the power

"The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side." (Hunter S. Thompson)

Here's your chance to challenge that assumption. As from Tuesday 4 January, the GLR (94.9 FM) schedule

will change – with the amount of music played at Breakfast and Drivetime reduced. These changes are being implemented by stealth, with no regard for feedback from license payers. Music industry concerns aside, the BBC should be accountable to its public.

With less music on GLR, and greater playlist constraints, we are slowly losing one of the few radio outlets for non-chart product and it appears the BBC is now only concerned with short shelf-life, mass appeal music. Many artists, producers and labels received their first break on GLR and a mention on-air can add 50-100 to the door count on a gig for a small promoter.

Please email the BBC with a note in your own words, telling them why the music policy at GLR has been important for you and how you feel about the changes. Those concerned should email: greg.dyke@bbc.co.uk and cc to: londonlive@hotmail.com and glr@bbc.co.uk

Stephen Budd, by email

The BBC, it seems, is coming face-to-face with the problem of being a publicly-funded institution operating in a commercial world. My particular beef is with BBC TV. What is its role? Public information and education? Well, the docu-soap nonsense of Airport and the like hardly fits in with this brief. And if these programmes are made to be more populist and compete for market share, then why not go the whole hog and run commercials? If I see another cooking, gardening, animal vet hospital or docu-soap I'm gonna slit my wrists. Personally, I find it offensive having to cough up more money for the new digital services, and your letter shows that it's not only TV services that are suffering. Catalogue the BBC along with the NHS under the file marked 'Do something now, or kiss it goodbye…'

Chris Kempster

Song vs. track

I have been reading *The Mix* since the early days and I thank you for you invaluable source of information and review material. This is the first time I have taken the opportunity to email you as the invitation in *Open Mic* issue 71 to comment on the current standard of songwriting was too great to resist.

A GLR fan tunes in for the latest news

So in answer to the question "is the good ol' acoustic guitar test still valid?" Absolutely! To make my point, it is probably worth making a distinction between a song and a piece of music. I am sorry, but 15 minutes of drum'n'bass with a few vocal samples thrown in for good measure does not equal a song. Don't get me wrong, I have been working in the digital studio world since the early days and have helped and supported a large number of budding electronic musicians, so I have listened to my fair share of E-music and yes, I have my favourites and recognise talent where I see it. Do I know the names of the artists? Nope! Do I know the names of the so-called songs? Nope! Do most people care? Probably not, but one thing I do know is that it is unlikely that I will be listening to it in 10 years time. Why? Because it's just music, not a song. It doesn't make a statement. Most the time it doesn't take you anywhere in particular. It rarely has a hook and invariably can't be performed live. It just sounds good at the time and is usually impeccably produced with a 'great' snare sound

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letter of the month

I could do that

The art of songwriting is alive and well. Stop worrying about standards being eroded by single-loop hits. The entry-level standard to making hits has just dropped again, that's all. There were '60s guitar-riff-laden hits, awash with phase. Punk brought a mass of one-chord wonders. The first on the block with the latest synth sound is always ensured at least one hit. Jive Bunny was a sample-based medley waiting to happen. Repetition, novelty and simplicity reflect both the pop song's charm and irritation level and we all declare 'I could have done that'. A well-crafted song will include much more: an intro, a melody, a hook, a middle-eight and perhaps even a counter-melody – and so on. Construction requires a capable, skilled and experienced songwriter. A novice, however, can come along and use fewer elements to achieve a chart-topper. A wave of newcomers jump on the band-wagon to a chorus of 'I could do that'. Fortunately, a few of this new school have the talent to outlast initial short-term success and go home to hone their work to produce very polished songs that cannot fail to break into the charts. We then conclude: 'I wish I could have done that'!

Gary Hawtin, by email

Don't you just hate it when you hear a song on the radio and someone says, "I could do that"? The world is full of people who resent what other people are doing or achieving, but can't be bothered to get off their asses and do it themselves. If you think you can do better, then go out and prove it. Today's technology means that anyone can start making tunes, and releasing them commercially. And that's great. Music shouldn't be the preserve of the educated, the wealthy and the 'in-crowd', it's for everyone and anyone. So to all those who say "anyone could do that", I say get your finger out of your ass, make some good music, and get it out there. Then you can write to me from a Barbadian beach and say "I told you so".

Chris Kempster

and interesting effects.

Recently you have published several letters from readers slagging off the music of the '70s and '80s as self-indulgent dirge. Well, as a bassist who has played in bands from the early '80s to present, I can say that a single sitting of *Top of the Pops* is enough to convince anyone that disco was cool by comparison. At least disco had a sense of humour and didn't take itself so seriously. This endless procession of boy/girl bands has to end sometime, hopefully soon.

What is notable from the '70s and '80s however, is the large number of live albums that were produced by leading artists, which the fans adored irrespective of the fact that the recording quality was often sub-standard. Many an anthem and classic 'song of our time' has been lifted from these live albums, as any producer worth his salt knows that these gems are impossible to reproduce in the studio environment.

I think what is missing, and is particularly prevalent amongst UK acts today, is this lack of live performance. True performance is the basis of all modern music. Look at Robbie Williams. I was amongst the cynics when he first hit the airwaves, but you have to admit he can really put on a show, rarely mimes when appearing in public and is supported by an excellent band. This is the hallmark of great performer, which is why he has been so successful internationally and stands out from his contemporaries. Ironically he came from a boy band, which invites the argument that boy/girl bands make for a great training ground for the performers of the future. Maybe, but there does seem to be an awful lot of them today and most of them mime everything they do, which is tantamount to fraud. Again this is what differentiates the Spice Girls for example, as like Robbie W, they usually sing live!

Down Under in New Zealand, we are lucky enough to get a pretty good cross-section of the music industry, and one has to say that the North American market is leaving the UK behind. The scope of music talent is wide, from grunge to rock to country, electronica, rap, even modern opera, and if you appear on TV, guess what – you'd better be able to pull it off, otherwise you will get booed off the stage.

While I don't know of Ray Hedges' work personally, he is obviously top in his field to have produced bands such as Boyzone, Take That and B*Witched, so I don't know whether to congratulate him or curse him, as frankly he is not doing the music industry any favours! I am sure the money is good, however.

'Stand up the great songwriters' I say, and dust off that trusty acoustic guitar, as never have you been wanted more. My only hope is that all this technology and the new internet distribution opportunities paves the way for talented young musicians to produce some great songs and to get their music successfully to the masses, because if I have to suffer *Top of the Pops* much longer I am probably going throw up!

Barry White, New Zealand

Personally I think that some of the greatest songs ever are out-and-out pop songs (ever heard of the Beatles?), and if a boy band or girl band sings great pop songs, then vive la boy or girl band. Recent songs that I think are great (but don't necessarily like) are 'Blue', 'Do You Believe', 'She's The One', anything by the Spice Girls, '9pm (Til I Come)', 'Better off Alone'... do I need to go on? But hey, variety is the life of spice, as they say, and the last decade has seen such a potpourri of different styles and sounds that it'd be churlish to complain that things ain't what they used to be.

Chris Kempster

You don't need to tell Ralph McTell to dust off his acoustic guitar.

Stolen samples

Thanks for the top mag. I have posted a message to *The Mix* online forum asking for help to recover or replace my sample CDs and the *Future Music* cover CDs I have just had stolen. Unfortunately, I was not insured, so I cannot get any cash to buy new ones. I'd like to advise all your readers to sort out insurance so they don't end up like me: with no PC, no samples, no music and no fun.

Damian Gunner, by email

Nice to see some of you have discovered our new online forum. For those that haven't, you can access it via www.themix.net and talk music production to your heart's content every day of the week. The rest of the website's not quite up to speed yet, but feel free to check it out and send us your comments and suggestions.

And if any kind-hearted reader can help Damian out with some spare sample CDs, please get in touch via the forum.

Andrea Robinson

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Who tests the gear

Our team of equipment reviewers are all audio industry professionals, experts in their chosen fields – engineers, producers, remixers, musicians and software specialists. This means that you can trust the opinions expressed in our reviews.

How the gear is tested

Wherever possible, the gear we test is used in actual sessions. Indeed, some of the biggest-selling records this year will have acted as testbeds for our reviewers. We believe that to truly evaluate kit properly, it needs to be tested in studio conditions – not a dark room!

Impartiality

Reviews in **THE MiX** are in no way biased towards certain manufacturers. We will deliver an impartial verdict on a product whether or not a manufacturer advertises in this magazine. Our first duty is to you, the reader, and our goal is to give you the best possible advice on buying equipment. We will not hesitate to expose sub-standard equipment.

THE MiX EDITOR'S CHOICE

Products that are judged to be outstanding by our reviewers are awarded the 'Editor's Choice' tag. In a standard review, this means that the product offers exceptional performance for the price it retails for. In group tests, there may be two awards – 'Best Performance' and 'Best Value'. The 'Best Performance' award will go to the product that offers the best performance irrespective of price, while the 'Best Value' award will go to the product that offers the best price/performance ratio.

The Mix reviews team

Alan Branch
Producer/engineer/remixer and part of London's famed On-U-Sound production team, Alan's credits include Sinead O'Connor, Bjork, and Primal Scream's newly-released *Exterminator* album.

Adam Crute
Adam manages *The Mix*'s in-house recording studio and masters our cover CD every month. A dedicated fan of PC-based music software, mere mention of the word 'Mac' brings tears to his eyes.

Trevor Curwen
Engineer/producer and retro fiend Trev was the man behind the desk on some of the best albums of the '90s, including Portishead's *Dummy* and Spritualized's *Ladies and Gentlemen We Are Floating in Space.*

Steve Evans
A Bath-based freelance engineer, producer and songwriter, Steve learned his craft both on the road and in his own 16-track commercial studio. His most recent project was a remix of M's 'Pop Muzik'.

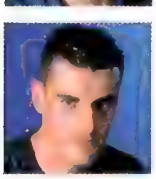
Adam Fuest
His production credentials take in film soundtracks and acts such as Drugstore and indie band Astrohound. Adam is based 2,500 feet up in the Brecon Beacons, where he runs his own Twin Peaks residential studio.

David Harrow
Producer and keyboard player David has appeared on albums by Lee 'Scratch' Perry, Dub Syndicate and Jah Wobble. His alter-ego is drum'n'bass guru James Hardway – expect to see a new album this June.

Jon Musgrave
A house engineer at London's Roundhouse studios, Jon's diverse credits include Culture Club, Beverley Knight and Mercury Rev. He recently engineered the Mike Spencer remix of Queen/Bowie's 'Under Pressure'.

Tim Oliver
Tim began his career in 'Madchester' where he produced early demos for The Stone Roses. He went on to notch up credits with Gene, M-People, New Order, The Happy Mondays, and most currently, Indigo Girls.

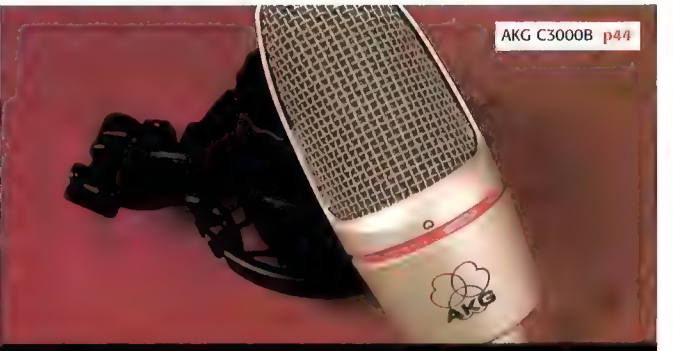
Seb Pecchia
Seb earned his spurs as a house engineer at Peter Gabriel's Real World studios. Now in the process of kitting out his own top-notch studio near Bath, Seb will shortly be releasing an album under the moniker 'Snowhill'.

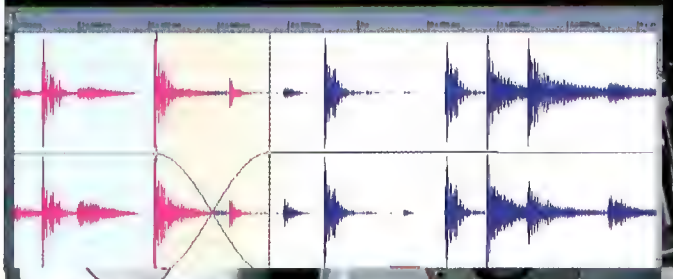


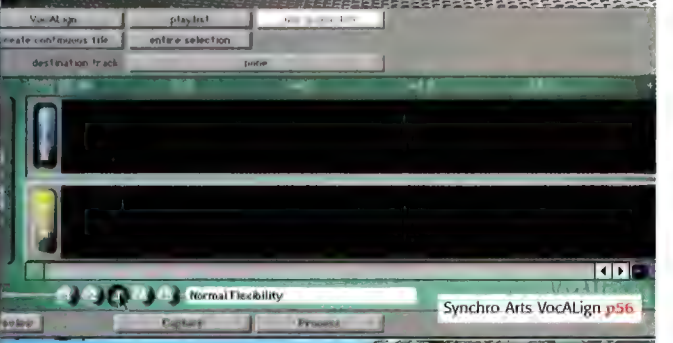
Sean Vincent
Having started his career as a tape-op at Matrix studios, Sean has gone on to carve out a successful, and varied, career as a studio and live engineer. He's ridden the faders for Five, 911, Damage and The Honeyz.

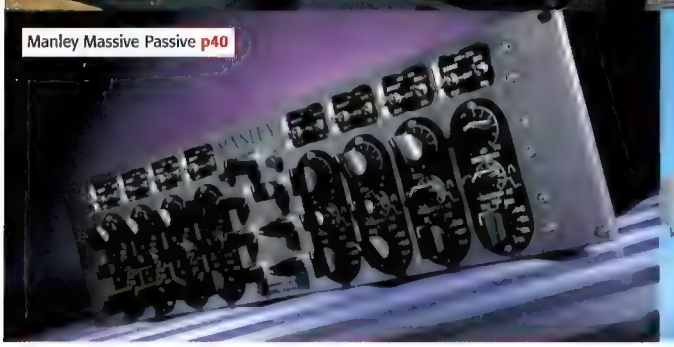
reviews

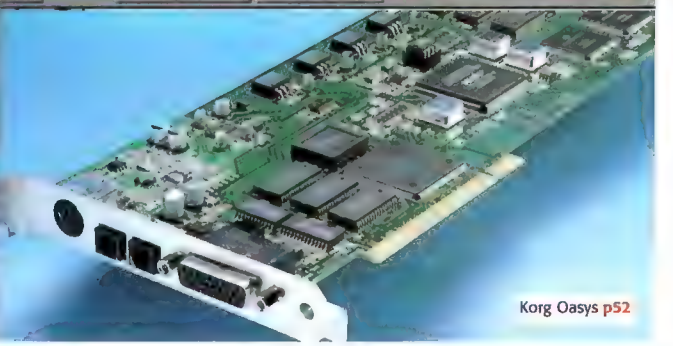
This month: Yamaha's latest hands-on samplers, Korg's monster Oasys soundcard, the updated version of Steinberg's Wavelab, Manley's high-end EQ, ground-breaking reverb from Sony, ATC's active monitors, Synchro Arts' VocALign plug-in, and more











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› Esoteric operating system
Verdict Both feature-packed samplers sound great, but the A4000 wins by a nose thanks to its value for money

There's never been a better time to get into sampling – just look at the choices available. The two big players in the sampler market, Akai and E-mu, are selling their products at knockdown prices, and Yamaha, who returned to the sampler market two-and-a-half years ago with the A3000, are about to release a couple of feature-packed samplers, the A5000 and A4000. Similarly, software developers are beginning to take their slice of the pie.

The problem is that the options are getting a bit bewildering – although a bit of healthy competition keeps prices low. Many computer owners must be wondering whether they really need a hardware sampler at all. Existing sampler owners will no doubt be considering which way they should upgrade, and which platform will be the best. For new samplists, all of the above questions may well apply. So it is against this background and some pretty strong competition that Yamaha release these new MIDI stereo samplers.

Overview

In a move not unlike Akai's release of the S5000 and S6000 samplers just over a year ago, Yamaha are releasing two brand-new products at the same time. Physically very similar to each other, the two units differ in some fundamental ways, such that the A4000 (the junior of the two), cannot be upgraded to achieve the same specification as the A5000. The differences are polyphony (64 or 126), multitimbrality (16-part or 32-part), and effects (three or six).

Aside from these points, the samplers are very similar, offering a wealth of improvements over the A3000. Of course, the physical similarities between the A3000 and the new models are self-evident, but gone is the blue fascia, replaced with a more professional grey brushed steel.

One improvement that will come as no surprise to existing A3000 users is the large LCD screen. Although the operating system is similar in concept to Version 2 on the A3000, it's implemented in a far more visual way, making full use of the new graphic facilities.

However, it would be foolish to dwell too long on the differences between these two units. What is stunning is the wealth of facilities common to both. There are 96 different FX types,16 filter types, sample-specific EQ and MIDI-syncable LFO.

Samples can be modified using the loop divide and remix functions, re-sampled from the outputs, sampled via the effects boards or sampled straight to disk. Compatibility with other file formats is probably the most extensive yet, and includes Akai S1000/S3000 (programs and samples), E-mu EIIIx (presets and samples), Roland S760 (most patches and samples), WAV, AIFF, Yamaha's own EX5/7 and TX16W. Samples can also be exported to disk in both WAV and AIFF format, which is rather impressive.

There's a basic sequence recorder/player, a 4-band EQ at the stereo outputs, and the front panel knobs send out MIDI data and can be used as real-time controllers. Storage options include external SCSI for hard drives and CD-ROMs, internal SCSI and IDE for internal hard drives and Zip drives (should you not require the supplied floppy drive), and a couple of backup options to SCSI CD-R or CD-RW.

Although both units only come supplied with 4Mb of onboard RAM, this can be expanded to 128Mb with standard 72-pin SIMMs in the four slots provided. To cap things off, both units come with the Yamaha Professional Library of eight CD-ROMs, as well as editing software for both PC and Mac. Considering that the more inexpensive of these two samplers retails for just under a grand, that is one pretty serious

words **Jon Musgrave** images **Gavin Roberts**

specification, and one that should have the other sampler manufacturers dropping their prices – and their jaws – even further.

Interface

Anyone familiar with the A3000 will find the front panels of the 4000 and 5000 pretty familiar. Inputs, record level, output volume, headphone socket and screen contrast are found at the left-hand end of the front panel. The mode keys and function keys make up a matrix at the right-hand end of the front panel, and three buttons (command, assignable and audition) sit below these to the left of the floppy drive.

The large LCD screen is accompanied by five dual-function knobs that can be both rotated and pressed, and correspond to elements on the screen. The back of the A4000 is pretty basic with two stereo outputs, MIDI in, out and thru, one 50-pin half-pitch SCSI connector, a cooling fan, a standard IEC mains socket and an expansion slot for extra outputs and digital connections. The A5000 is exactly the same, but has an additional MIDI in and thru (though for some reason no extra MIDI out).

With a large LCD screen Yamaha have finally caught up with the competition in terms of the user interface – although Akai's S5000 and S6000 are still out there on their own. A detailed explanation of the screen layouts can be found in the *Screen Saver* box (see page 31). However, one thing that the A4000 and A5000 do share with their predecessor is an operating system which is at best novel, and at worst very frustrating.

CD info

tracks 11-14
Yamaha's own demos of the A4000 and A5000, showing off the filters, easy edit and synth FX

c: Netscape Online

File Edit View Help

Name | Size | Modified

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For anyone who is unfamiliar with it, here's a quick round-up. Akai's approach to sampling, although sometimes a little baffling, is based on a system where a raw sample is modified in a number of ways (LFO, filter, key span, layering, outputs and so on), by the parameters of a program. These programs can then be placed in a multi, allowing you to use your sampler like a multitimbral synth.

Yamaha's approach is a little more esoteric, with the parameters you might normally expect to find in a program actually part of the sample. What's more, in order to group samples together and apply the same treatment to them, they can be put in banks too. Although these samples and sample banks are then put into programs for the purposes of playback, the program merely acts as a host for them and a means to save them together.

The system has a maximum of 128 program 'locations' into which programs can be loaded. In a concession to the way people like to work (and let's not forget, Akai only introduced a multitimbral mode with the S3000), the A4000 and A5000 now support a multi-mode, with 16 parts on the 4000 and 32 parts on the 5000.

So, you can now breathe a sigh of relief that all these wonderful facilities are available in a familiar manner. Well, almost. This system still takes quite a bit of getting used to. For example, once you've recorded a sample, although you can audition it from the front panel with the audition key, it has to be put into a program to play it via MIDI – which is basically quite annoying.

Thankfully, although the manual goes into great detail in some sections, it does have a quick start chapter at the beginning, which will quickly familiarise you with the Yamaha way of doing things. Of course Yamaha's approach does have some advantages, especially if as an Akai user you've ever lost the vital program information that goes with a raw sample and turns it into something brilliant. Inevitably, for anyone unfamiliar with other sampler operating systems, learning any new unit is going to be a steep learning curve, however, Yamaha have certainly followed their own path, so be prepared.

In use

On power-up both samplers display their respective names and default to the Play Sample page. This is a good starting point, as this is where you assign which MIDI channel the sample will use. Thankfully, the Yamahas come with seven standard waveforms on board (Akai take note!). These include sine, saw up, square, triangle and three pulse waves. No doubt you will soon tire of these and want to start some proper sampling; however, it may be worth loading up one of the four demo disks to see what the samplers can do.

Some excerpts from the first demo disk can be found on this month's cover CD. In fact it took a couple of attempts to get the demo to work, but once the factory settings were restored and the appropriate

What's in a name – the competition!

With the introduction of the A5000, all three major sampler manufacturers now make a '5000' model. However, each one has a slightly different feature set. Both Akai's S5000 and E-mu's E5000 are currently available at around £1,200 a piece, so at £1,499 the A5000 does have its work cut out for it. But, it does have 126-note polyphony and 32-part multitimbrality, if only four outputs.

Although the S5000 has 32-part multitimbrality, neither the S5000 or E5000 have the same level of polyphony, and the Akai doesn't even have an effects board. Obviously, 4Mb RAM as standard on the A5000 is a little stingy, but given the volatility of RAM prices, it will be interesting to see what sort of RAM the dealers start offering with the Yamahas.

Screen saver

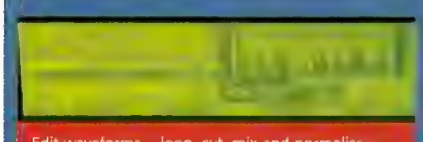
When Yamaha launched the A3000 sampler, one of the major gripes was the screen (a miserly two-row LCD affair). Thankfully, they have now addressed this problem, and their new models come suitably equipped with a green backlit LCD, not unlike that found on E-mu's new E5000 model.

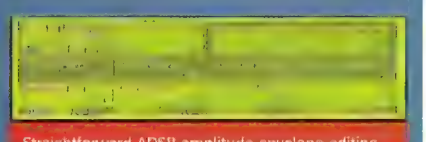
Although the operating system is not substantially different in concept to its predecessor, the large screen has allowed much more information to be displayed at any one time. Existing Yamaha sampler users may therefore find themselves with some rather welcome features. For example, full graphical editing of samples, visual representations of filter types, EQ, effects routing, output routing, key span – that's mapping in Yamaha speak – and so on. In fact, so keen have they been to make full use of the new screen, you may initially find it a little confusing. However, worry not because here is a quick crash course.

The key to understanding the A5000/A4000 screen lies in the top left-hand corner. This box tells you which of the five main pages you're in as selected by the vertical buttons just to the right (play, edit, record, disk, utility). Each of these main pages has six main sub-pages selected with the six function keys. Just when you thought that was it, each of these sub-pages can be paged through in two ways to access all the parameters. In the top left corner of the screen is the number '1' with a little arrow icon, indicating that rotating knob number one will page through the rows of parameters. Alternatively, simply press the corresponding function key repeatedly. Either way, a small marker in the top left-hand corner shows you which row you are on, which is quite useful for those pages that have lots of parameters.

Now, this may all seem a little unnecessary given that a quick look at the key matrix will tell you which page you're in, but in practice it actually proves quite useful. In part this is because of the way the unit remembers which page you were last on. For example, if you were in play program (play + F1), moved to edit sample (edit + F2), and then wanted to go to, say, play sample (play + F2), pressing play will initially jump you back to play program because that was the last 'play' page you were in. Now it may sound petty, but when you're trying to access pages quickly, having the page info as part of the display is very useful. So, thumbs up to Yamaha for that.

As previously mentioned, Yamaha's new samplers offer a full complement of graphical features. Worthy of special mention are three pages. Firstly, the sample trim/loop page, which makes good use of the screen to show both sample start and end points as well as loop points, with full zoom capabilities. Also within this page is a graphical representation of the loop remix function, making it very easy to see exactly what it has done to your favourite loop. With the filter/EQ pages Yamaha have again come up trumps, with graphical displays of exactly what the various parameters are doing as you change them. Finally, the effects pages are well-implemented, showing the interconnection of the three blocks within each effects buss. This is definitely useful for the A5000, which allows its two effects engines to be interconnected.


Edit waveforms – loop, cut, mix and normalise


Straightforward ADSR amplitude envelope editing

features

- 96 fully-editable effect types, including chorus, flanger, wah, rotary, distortion, autopan, delay, reverb, gate
- 16 filter types: low-pass 1, 2 and 3 all with resonance, high-pass 1 and 2 with resonance, band-pass, band eliminate, peak 1 and 2, dual peak, dual eliminate, dual low pass, low pass + peak, dual high pass, high pass + peak, low pass + high pass
- Back up to CD-R and CD-RW
- Amplitude, pitch and filter envelope
- MIDI-clockable LFO with choice of four waveforms: saw, triangle, square and sample and hold
- Loop remix and loop divide
- Audition of samples direct from disk
- Two separate MIDI continuous controller set-ups
- Sample recording via effects board
- Analogue inputs can be blended with outputs
- 'Easy edit' option to quickly change mix and output levels, filter, pitch, amplitude envelope, velocity sensitivity and crossfade in one page
- Export samples to WAV and AIFF format
- Time-stretch with real-time audition
- Sample normalize and auto normalize
- Fade and crossfade with choice of curve types
- Sequence recorder and player
- Panel play with real-time generation of MIDI info from knobs
- 'Total EQ' 4-band EQ across stereo outputs

The A5000's back panel, with the extra MIDI in and thru that you won't find on the A4000

'sequence' loaded, rather than volume, program or sample, we were up and running. One minor niggle was the load time from the floppy disk (three minutes for one floppy!). Still, the demo gave a pretty good impression of the quality of both the filters and effects available on the A4000 and A5000.

Sampling via the audio inputs proved pretty straightforward and highlighted some of the innovative features. For example, although the Yamahas do not have direct-to-disk recording and playback, it's possible to use the 'save' option to sample straight to disk. Also, within the record set-up it's possible to replace an existing sample or add-on to the end of one as well as starting afresh.

Other parameters are also selected here, such as sampling frequency, pre-trigger, auto-normalise, automatic key-mapping, trigger method and so on. Strangely, there appeared to be no way of triggering from a MIDI note, which is a little frustrating.

Anyway, many of the features found here really embarrass the competition. Once sampled and assigned to a key and program (all of which can be done automatically as noted above), you may want to normalise the sample. This can be done in two different pages. The first is the trim/loop edit page (edit + F1), and the second is the command menu. The command menu is a bit of a strange one – it's accessed by pressing the 'command/exit' key, and gets you into two different menus, depending on which mode you're in.

If you're in 'disk mode' it accesses various functions such as save, format and the CD-R backup features. From the other modes it accesses a selection of functions, most of which do not fit in the other pages. These include process, under which you'll find normalise, loop divide, re-sample, copy, delete and so on. Returning to the trim/loop edit page throws up some more useful features. These include start and end catch, which allow you to capture your start and end points and loop points on the fly while the sample is playing.

Also within these pages is one of the most innovative functions on the Yamahas. The Loop Remix option essentially rearranges sections of your sample into a different order, incorporating selectable options such as retuned bits, reverse bits and so on. This is a great function for adding life to what would otherwise be a boring loop.

The other great loop modifying feature on the A4000 and A5000 is the loop divide option. Found in the command menu, this splits the sample up into specified sections such as eighth notes and maps the samples out across the keyboard as a sample bank. It's a bit like a basic version of Recycle.

The other sample editing features also prove quite interesting. Within the filter pages, as well as some very good filters, there is a real-time 1-band EQ for each sample. The filters themselves proved to be very flexible, with five random velocity-to-cut-off settings – a must for those of you trying to create analogue-style synth sounds.

As mentioned above, both samplers have a complement of 96 (yes – 96!) effect types. These are arranged in one buss of three on the A4000, and two busses of three on the A5000. Overall, these effects are of high quality. As you may have come to expect, send levels to these effects are part of the sample parameters, and thankfully, the routing is shown graphically in the edit sample page (edit + F2).

The effect set-up itself is filed under play effect (play + F4). This is where each of the effects is selected, modified and routing decided. Each effect can either be sent straight to the outputs or chained to the next one. This allows for a pretty serious set-up, and on the A5000 effects from the two busses can be routed to each other for even more flexibility.

While using the Yamaha samplers, various other cool features crop up. Firstly, the five mode buttons flash when receiving MIDI data, but each one responds to different types of data. Also rather nice are the panel play options, which turn the front panel

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specifications

Conversion
A-D: 20-bit 64x oversampling
D-A: 24-bit 8x oversampling

Digital I/O (optional)
S/PDIF coax and optical

Digital sampling frequency
48, 44.1, 32 kHz @ input (ext sync), 44.1 kHz @ output

Analogue sampling frequency
44.1, 22.05, 11.025, 5.5125 kHz (mono & stereo)

Standard RAM
4Mb

Max RAM
128Mb (72-pin SIMMS)

Max sample length
32Mb mono, 64Mb stereo

Max sampling time
6min 20sec mono or stereo @ 44.1 kHz

Polyphony
64 (A4000), 126 (A5000)

Programs
128

Effects
3 blocks (A4000), 6 blocks (A5000)

Outputs
2 stereo expandable to 5 stereo

Internal expansion
IDE and SCSI

External expansion
50-pin SCSI (micro D/half-pitch)

Weight
8kg

Dimensions
480 x 461 x 90mm

A4000 or A5000?

Visually, the A5000 and A4000 are very similar. The only physical difference (apart from the badge) is the casing trim – the A4000 is blue with grey knobs (and definitely more sexy) and the A5000 is black with black knobs. So the question has to be 'what do you get for your extra 500 quid?'.

Well, although both samplers offer a wealth of upgrade options, there are a few features that limit the upgrade path from A4000 to A5000. Firstly, the A5000 has 126-note polyphony versus the 64 of the A4000. Secondly, the A5000 is 32-part and the A4000 16-part. Finally, the A5000 has two FX busses with up to three FX in each, where the A4000 has one FX buss of three FX.

So it's worth thinking carefully about whether any of these extra specifications will be important to you when deciding on which unit to go for. On a positive note, both samplers do offer a wealth of other upgrade options. In a similar fashion to the A3000, an additional six outputs plus S/PDIF and optical connectors are supplied on one upgrade board.

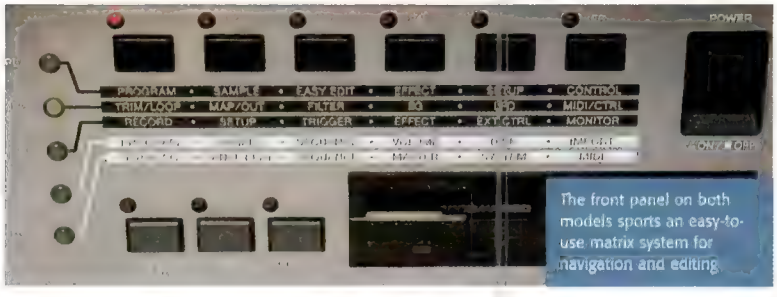
However, it's the internal hard drive options that may worry the competition. Both A4000 and A5000 have an internal IDE buss for connection of up to two IDE drives, as well as internal and external SCSI connections. The only limitation internally is the space, with only one internal slot and the floppy drive bay. Still, this is a good range of storage facilities for units at this price. Incidentally, Yamaha are keen for owners to perform the upgrades themselves, and include fool-proof instructions at the back of the manual for all the upgrade options.

knobs and function keys into assignable MIDI-generating controllers. The latching audition button option is also a nice touch.

The supplied CD-ROM library proved pretty extensive, but also rather memory-hungry, so you'll probably want to budget for some extra RAM as well as £120 for a SCSI CD-ROM drive. Also included is a variety of Yamaha software for PC and Mac, including XG Works Lite (a sequencing package), a wave editor and exchange software for transferring data to and from your PC or Mac.

Compatibility with other sample formats was quite encouraging, although the system is still limited to eight characters for WAV file format. The export function also worked without a hitch. Although it was not possible to try it, the A4000 and A5000 allow you to back up to CD-R and CD-RW, and this facility takes two forms. One allows you to copy data from up to eight different disk sources onto a CD-R or CD-RW as a write-at-once procedure. The second allows you to burn up to 99 separate audio tracks of samples (as long as they are 44.1kHz) to create an audio CD.

Both are fantastic options; however, there are also some annoyances. Although the headphone socket is on the front panel, there's no separate headphone level control. The knobs themselves can be a little fiddly, and unlike Akai and E-mu samplers, there's no keypad for entering numbers. In fact, the whole method of entering data and moving around pages takes a lot of getting used to, mainly because there isn't one dedicated data wheel. This means that one minute you're adjusting data with knob two and the next with knob four. Something else which is slightly annoying are the program options, as even if you delete all the associated samples and banks, a program retains its name and cannot be blanked, which seems pretty pointless.



The front panel on both models sports an easy-to-use matrix system for navigation and editing

Verdict

Once upon a time, not so long ago, there was an industry-standard sampler, and it was an Akai. Although it remains incredibly popular, the Akai isn't really an industry-standard anymore. This means that other manufacturers have a real opportunity to step in and take that crown.

The problem remains, however, that although cross-platform compatibility has improved, most people like to stick to one platform. Once you start to build up a sample library, the last thing you want to do is convert it all to another format. One thing Yamaha have got right is sample format compatibility. They've also crammed their samplers with so many features it would be impossible to discuss them all here. However, they still employ an operating system which is slightly out of the ordinary, and may therefore find it difficult to attract Akai and E-mu users. For the first-time buyer this may be of little consequence, and for the bargain-hunter the A4000 definitely gets our vote. As ever, the choice is yours.

More from: Yamaha-Kemble, Sherbourne Drive, Tillbrook, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK7 8BL Tel: 01908 366700
Web: www.yamaha.co.uk

Steinberg Wavelab 3

PC audio editing software

Price £399 › Upgrade from V2 £100
For Montage window lifts PC editing into a new league › Unlimited undo with History list › New Time Bandit engine time-stretching capabilities › Fast new metering
Against Still looks a bit flat › Quirky key commands as default
Verdict An update certainly worth having, with a wealth of new features and refinements

words
Alan Branch

To design an editor that incorporates all the functions you're going to need isn't easy, and generally most of us don't use more than two or three programs for our audio – life's short enough to be worrying about learning loads of software packages. So we all look for programs with the right balance of features, and a good user interface to speed the whole creative process.

Ideally an editor has to have a large, easy-to-see waveform with a smooth playback display, and a range of easy-to-use functions for quick and powerful editing. Wavelab – used by many as an advanced internal editor for Cubase and used by many others because of its use of VST effects – has now laid down a marker for others to follow with its range of new intuitive features for hard-disk editing.

With a pedigree like Steinberg's you can always expect something exciting when updates are released, and Wavelab is no exception. Borrowing a few neat bits of code from its soon-to-be-unleashed cousin Nuendo, Wavelab is leaner, meaner and more powerful than ever. Whether compiling an album, editing samples or dabbling with a bit of noise reduction, it's all here, with VST support and save options that now bring it more in line with Sound Forge, and with functions like multi-media save and load options like MP3.

Overview

Assuming you're already aware of the previous version, we'll concentrate on the best of the new bits. Apart from improved menu changes and added options, Wavelab's main new feature lies in a new user interface called the Audio Montage System. With a fast turn of speed utilising some slick new coding, it's now more like a fully-featured multi-track editor.

With a new-look overview double-pane window, real-time graphic volume changes and more menu options than your local curry house, it's very powerful indeed. We had a pre-release look at it at AES New York in September and it seemed a program reborn – the tired look and feel we were used to now has the spit and polish of a newly spec'd F1 car. Could this be next year's model to win the races?

In use

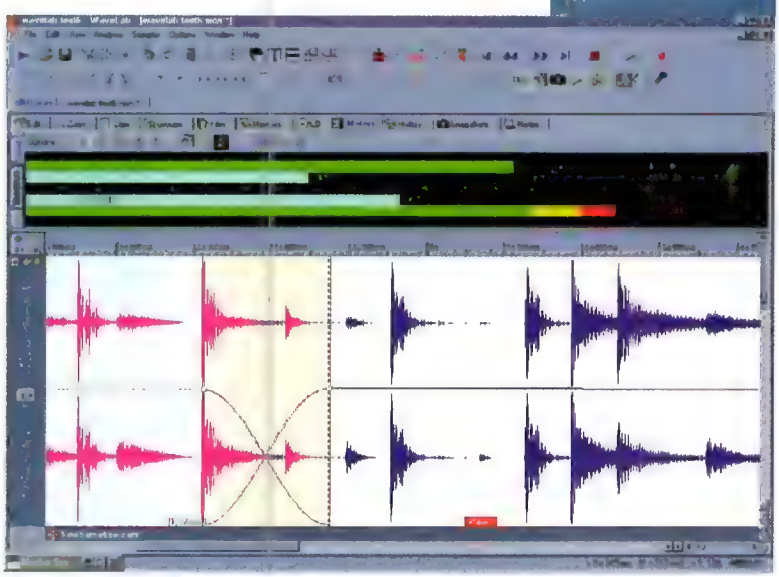
The Audio Montage has unlimited audio tracks for the main purpose of editing, playback, and recording audio. Audio placed and named as clips can be worked on via a clever interface with a full range of functions for fades/crossfades, volume adjustment and the like as well as effect slots with up to ten VST effects per clip. Using overlapping tabbed windows, the workstation look is achieved by delivering different sections of session information with an easy-to-get-at arrangement.

Editing is now clip-based, with each clip easily created by simply dragging it into the montage window. These clips are represented by a non-destructive waveform that turns semi-transparent as it's dragged over another waveform. This is a very cool idea and it's definitely impressive the first time you see it.

The crossfade has optional auto-crossfade modes. As a clip is dragged across another it can be automatically crossfaded – both sonically and graphically in real-time,

CD info

track 01
Want to try out one of the best audio editors we've seen? Then fire up the Wavelab 3 demo on this month's CD



Versatile audio cross-fading – marvel as the waveform changes appearance in real-time

Montage Tabs

Edit
General overview display and cross-fade options

Zoom
Close-up view in the top pane for aligning of clips and crossfades. Includes a 'match waveform' function.

Clips
Lists all clips with edit details.

Groups
For selecting different groups of clips.

Files
Mini-explorer for importing audio/clips.

Markers
Create a range of markers, including temporary and named generic location markers through to PQ-type CD track start and end markers.

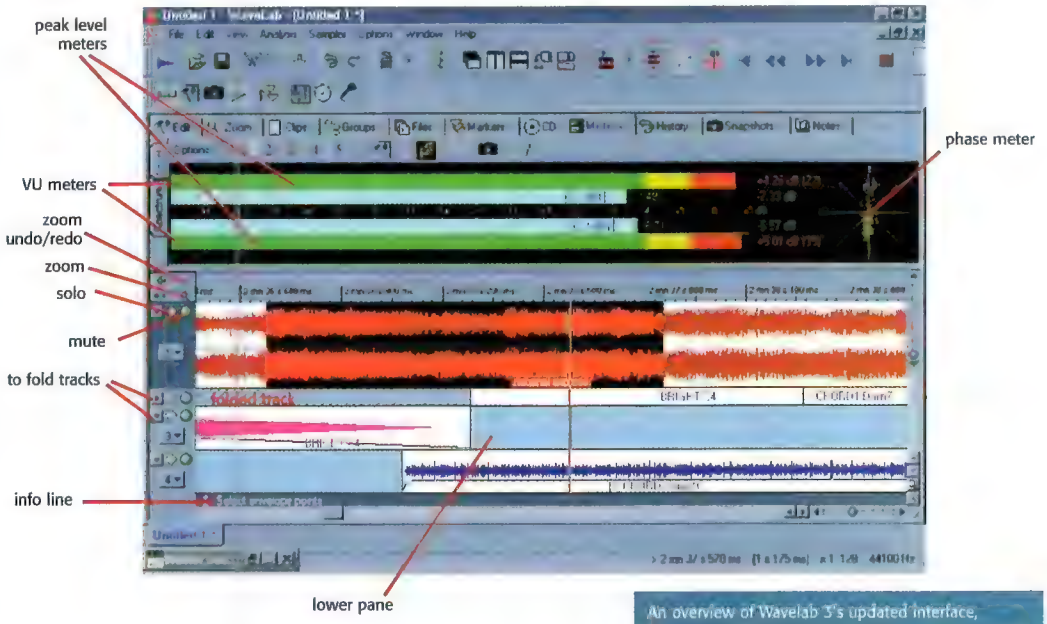
CD
Create full Red Book CDs. Easy-to-use wizards and auto CD track markers ensure simple CD production.

Meters
These layer VU and peak-metering with colour-coded level value displays. They can also be switched to a 60-band real-time spectrum analyser.

History
A full list of the unlimited undos, also the time of execution. Montage has separate undo/redo from the normal wave part of Wavelab which has its own undo/redo.

Snapshots
Quick recall/saving of different views.

Notes
A good place for storing your studio shopping list.



An overview of Wavelab 3's updated interface, complete with the excellent montage window

where the waveform changes shape as the two clips merge. Steinberg have also included something called 'Waveform Recognition Technology' that avoids harmonic cancellations within the crossfade by adjusting the clip position automatically.

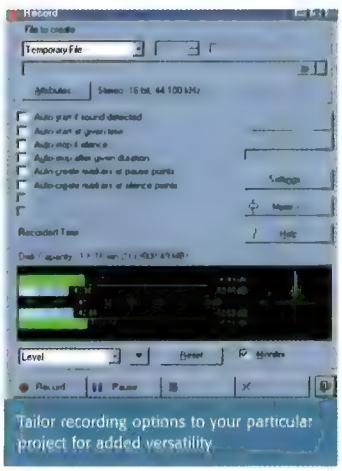
The Montage's adjustable two-pane window is created from new and has window tabs to access the different functions and views, one of which is a nice feature of an edit history. At last, a complete history of the work you've been slaving over for several hours, and at least you can go back if all goes wrong or the artist suddenly decides they don't like it. The tabs are labelled Edit, Zoom, Clips, Groups, Files, Markers, CD, Meters, History, Snapshots, and there's even one for Notes.

Included in the Montage window are CD wizards, automatic PQ track markers to help with CD creation, and a process function called the Meta Normalizer that helps to set an RMS level for all compiled clips.

The acronym WYSIWYH – what you see is what you hear – is certainly true with this powerful real-time editor. With experience of Pro Tools and Sadie-type editors there really hasn't been any others to rival them on the PC, and their clever user interfacing and large waveforms make crossfades and edits easy, but they cost a lot of money. Wavelab 3 and its Audio Montage is certain to change that, given that the main Montage window has very good support for easy to see views and a useful amount of commands.

The main Wavelab window has not been left out, although you might think so. We did expect a little makeover, even if it was some new colours for the icons – personally speaking, Wavelab has always looked a bit dull especially when compared to other programs. Steinberg say it was so the program remained familiar, which is fair enough.

The features they have improved are very good though, including some borrowed bits from the Montage window. The fast new meters, for example, appear in a new revised record dialogue-box that now has a range of automatic recording options, including features to auto-create markers at pause/silence points, or even the facility to create DAT start ID's. There's also a standard auto-start with adjustable threshold, as well as an auto-stop through silence feature which is very handy.



Tailor recording options to your particular project for added versatility

There are also well thought-of options like record buffers included, so no audio is missed when pausing, and you can happily automate many recording tasks, meaning you'll have more time to spend in the pub. Both the sampler support and CD drivers have been improved to ensure better support of current hardware than before, while the highly useful batch processing can now be done in the background while you carry on editing.

The time-stretching now has the highly-acclaimed Spectral Design's Time Bandit audio engine. Wavelab always had one of the best time-stretching capabilities, but now there's also the Quick process alongside a new Standard and High quality option. Using High quality and the selected Rhythm Accuracy has got to be good for getting those troublesome loops in time while still sounding good.

Wavelab 3 has support for the new VST2.0 plug-in architecture and dual-processor support, and at the moment there's optimisation for Pentium

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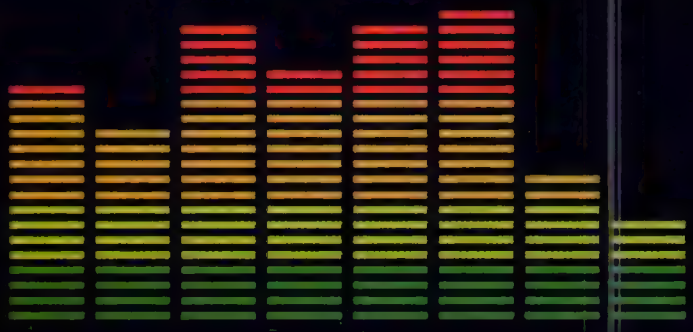
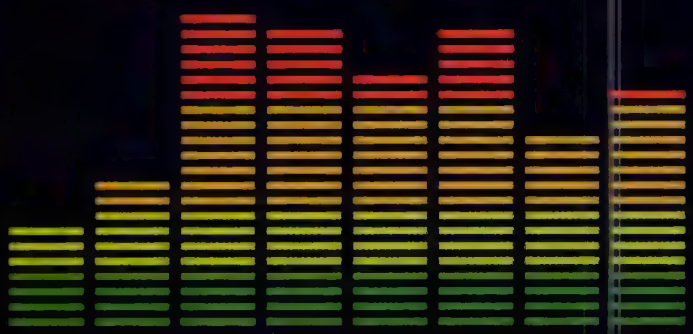


Hip Hop

Indie



Jazz

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CPUs and AMD's new hot kid on the block, the much talked-about Athalon, with its large onboard cache making it a plug-in paradise.

In use

We took Wavelab straight into the studio while mixing an album, and it was good to see it alongside the Sadie system we use for compiling mixes. The improved menus and new-style tabs for each audio file opened make it much better for fast editing. When importing a few CD tracks from an IDE CD-ROM it seems much faster now, but then most aspects of the program seem faster.

Selecting a new Montage will give a dual-pane window with a single stereo track, and further tracks can be created above and below, split into mono, folded, muted or even cloned. Upon these tracks audio is placed as clips from either selections in the wave window or via the file tab within Montage. Every clip has a line running through it, representing the volume envelope, with three main adjustable points: fade-in, main volume and fade-out. To adjust any volume you just click and move up or down, and the waveform graphic changes in real-time – you also get a dB value next to your mouse pointer as well.

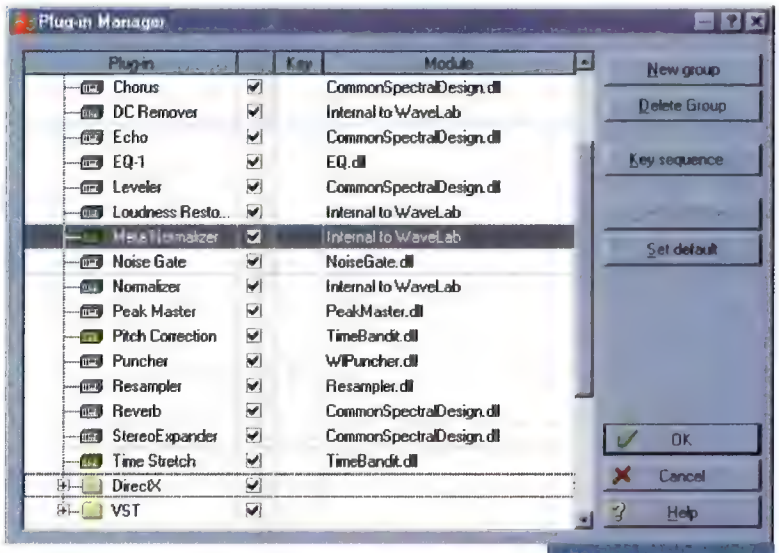
As programs are written with different key and mouse commands, it's good to see a lot of help on screen. The clips are broken into command 'Mouse Zones' for easy control. For example, clicking on the top of a clip gives a pop-up copy icon and just by dragging you can make a copy, with various options for automatic 'magnetic' placement and inserting.

Click on the bottom/lower area of a clip to move by dragging, while clicking in the upper clip area (not the top) turns the mouse into a selection tool for selecting audio within a clip, and this can then be looped, edited, copied and so on. All the time a clever 'Info Line' at the bottom of the screen gives you an onscreen guide to the zones and what would happen as your mouse moves over each zone.

Speedy functions, all with key commands, include a select menu offering various ways of selecting clips, including an option to 'auto-group' clips, so that when you select a clip to move, all the clips to the right of it will move too – very handy for arranging a project.

All audio can be placed with reference to a selectable time ruler at the top of the track window, and clips can also be made to 'snap' to time units contained within the ruler. This is one area where many editors still fall down – let's face it, a lot of people are going to use programs for music editing, so why not have an easy tempo-based ruler with not only snap-to-bar markers but beat movement-type dragging? This way, once a piece of audio is placed in a set tempo, you can happily chop and edit away knowing that when you move audio it's always in time, even if it's just a rough position – not just snapping your audio to the start of a bar but moving your clip in relation to the beats it was originally locked to. Having said that, Wavelab 3 has made good with its snap function and time ruler, including a sync to incoming MTC. Note that this, however, is just a trigger sync – a true word clock will be needed for your audio card to stay in sync.

This certainly opens the door for broadcast and film work. All it needs now is an AVI viewer for AV work.



Bring order to those unruly plug-ins with Wavelab's Plug-in Manager

Once you have your clips compiled and edited you can process them through the new Meta Normalizer, which will equalise the clips' peak levels and overall loudness – very useful when compiling tracks for a CD. The combination of this and some digital limiting like Waves Ultra-Maximizer is still the best for optimising CD tracks, making mastering a lot easier.

During use, Wavelab 3 corrupted an imported CD track, and when we spoke to a tech support guy he said it may be because of the Matrox dual-head AGP card we had installed, and added they don't really support this make of card, even though the same card worked fine with Wavelab 2.

Verdict

Wavelab 2.0 added CD burning to its features, but it still lost out to Sound Forge's CD Architect with its auto-crossfades, level and easy dragging adjustments. But it still remained the best at real-time processing with its support of VST, DirectX and Wavelab plug-ins via its master section. It's a pity it didn't look as good, although that's arguable.

Wavelab 3 changes all that, and the new Montage window is worthy of a completely separate program. The new commands and mouse zones will take a while to master but once done this has got to be one of the best editors we've seen. It's what the musician on a budget has been waiting for, with a good range of professional features – far too many here to list, like the audio database for file management or auto volume 'ducking' of clips from other clips.

These functions provide a great depth to the editing. The key commands are still somewhat different to the norm but are easily changed, and beat-matching-type drag-and-drop editing, like in Logic Audio, would have certainly iced the cake for us – that's splitting hairs and belongs on a wish list, but apart from that it has it all. Even Exabyte/DPP support and ISRC and UPN code for those large CD pressing plants! Mastering at home has arrived big time with Wavelab 3.

More from: Arbiter, Wilberforce Road, London, NW9 6AX Tel: 0181 970 1909
Web: www.arbitergroup.com

system requirements

- P133 processor or equivalent
- 32Mb RAM
- Win 95/98 or NT

Manley Massive Passive

Stereo tube EQ

Price £3,519

For Amazing sound control › Excellent audio quality › Inspires creativity

Against We can't afford one › Some switches click when used

Verdict An awesome EQ that sounds unlike any other. Well worth the money

Outboard EQ has made a real comeback in recent years, mainly thanks to the new technology that combines valve warmth with solid-state reliability. Plenty of manufacturers have brought out valve EQ modules, but only a few really have that special 'something'.

The Manley Massive Passive is one of those 'special' units. It's not cheap, but it's one of the best units available, and has been causing quite a stir within the industry ever since it made its debut at the Recording Technology show last July.

Overview

The Massive Passive (or Massivo as it has become known) is a 3u 19" rack stereo EQ based around a 4-band equaliser as well as high and low-pass filters. The Teutonic-looking unit is very solid, weighing a hefty 2lb, and is finished in brushed steel and black. The rotary controls and switches are also large and very solid.

The connections on the back panel sit either side of the rather large power transformer. There are balanced ins and outs on XLR and TRS 1/4" jacks. The jack sockets also accept an unbalanced signal.

The unit is arranged with the filters and input gain in the centre and the two 4-band EQs on either side. There are 44 switched frequencies available to play with, and these are spaced roughly 1/4 octave apart, ranging from 22Hz to 27kHz. The cut or boost range is 20dB both ways and the Q range is 1.5 to 3.

Each of the band 'ranges' has a frequency selector, a bell-shape selector and a control to boost the amount of cut or boost. The switches at the top select whether you are cutting or boosting and whether you are using a bell-shape or a shelving EQ.

The filters are split into high and low-pass. The low-pass reaches from 18k to 5k and the high-pass ranges from 22Hz to 220Hz. Above the input gain switches are the channel 'on' buttons. These are lit in blue and have a bypass circuit that automatically kicks in when the Massivo is switched on to prevent any pops or thumps reaching your monitors.

One of the features that makes the Massivo unique is the fact that it is totally passive – there's no active circuitry here. Also, the four bands overlap, enabling extremely accurate tuning of troublesome frequencies. But the main feature that made us take notice was the fact that this EQ uses parallel symmetrical topology. In other words, if you apply a 10dB boost at 1k on all four bands on a standard EQ, you get 40dB of boost. On the Massivo you get 10dB of boost. This means that you get a very organic interaction between the frequency bands, one that you have to hear to operate, rather than just looking at the front panel.

The lack of a cut/boost rotary control eliminates the inconsistencies associated with centre detentes, instead the 3-way switch is accurate and easy to use. Boost to hear the frequency you are working with clearly, then cut to the desired amount.

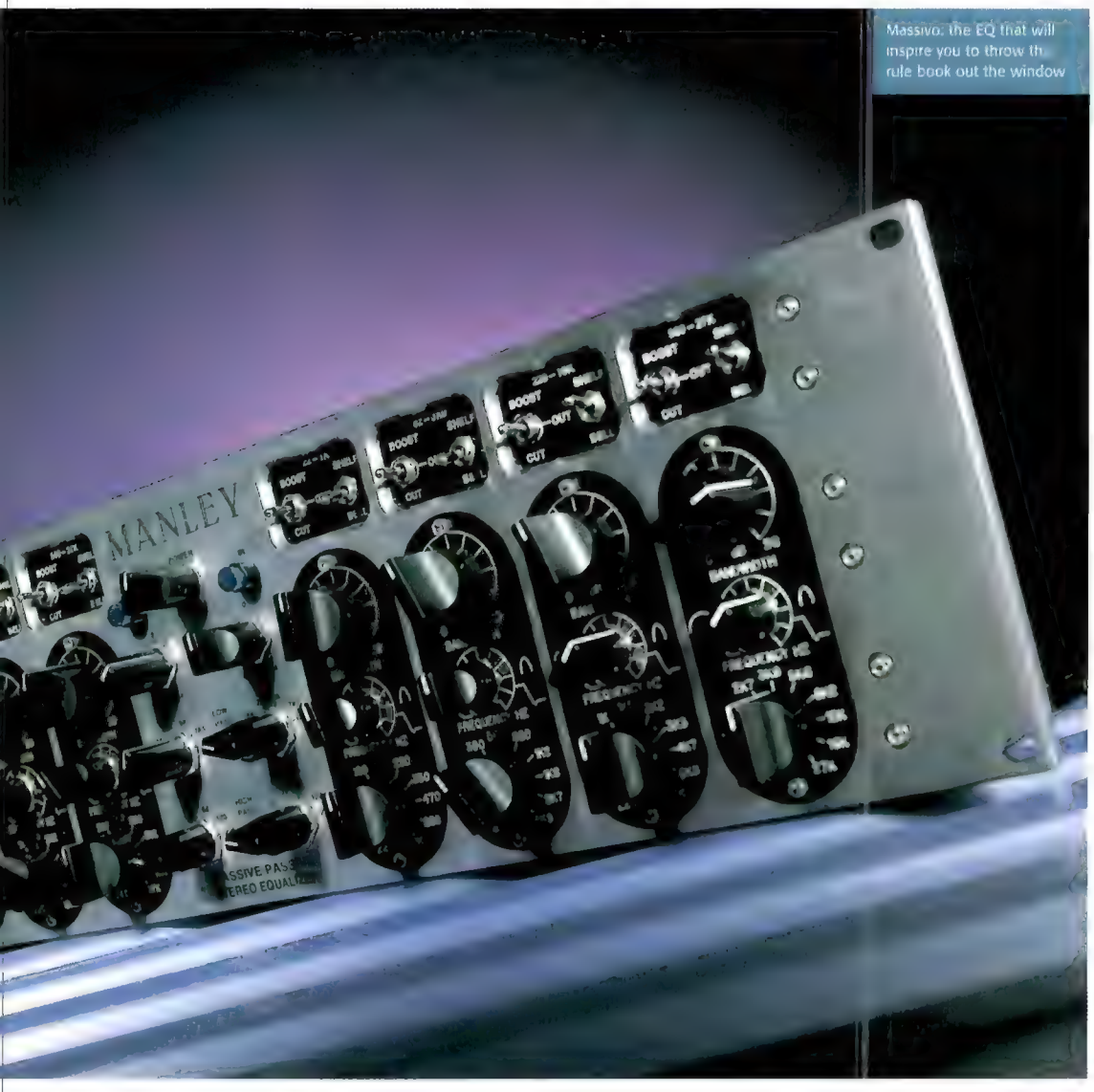
Old style

As some of you will remember, the old Pultec EQs have separate cut and boost controls, and some engineers would use both at the same time. Contrary to what you might think, they didn't cancel each other out; instead they created what became known as the Pultec Curve. This boosted the real lows and created a dip in the midrange, while the slope towards flat became steeper.

This all made for an impressive warm sound that so many engineers fell in love with. And coupled with the use of inductors, transformers and tubes, it gave a unique saturated

Connections
The back panel accepts balanced I/O on XLR, and balanced/unbalanced I/O on TRS 1/4" jacks

words **Sean Vincent** images **Simon Dodd**



Massivo: the EQ that will inspire you to throw the rule book out the window

sound that had plenty of headroom. Manley have designed the Massive Passive in much the same way, except, as mentioned before, it is wired in parallel, not in series as with the Pultec units. During the development stages, Manley tested it in some of the best mastering rooms available to get the sound just right. They stress that that it doesn't work (or sound) like any other EQ available.

The key to understanding the Massivo is that the controls are not independent. When you cut or boost at narrow bandwidths, you can get up to 20dB of cut or boost, but at the widest bandwidths you can only cut or boost by 6dB. That is the way the components work, and Manley have no desire to force them to do anything unnatural. The overall effect is very musical.

In use

With quality equalisers like this, it's important to realise that less is probably more. In other words, if you can't hear what it's doing, it's probably doing a good job. That's definitely the case with the Massive Passive in a lot of situations, but not all the time.

To start off, the EQ was connected to a PC's main outputs, running stereo masters through the Massivo to see what it could do with the sound. The harshness of the PC's A/D converters was sorted out instantly by using the low pass filter set to 18kHz.

The plan from there on in was to just mess around. Boosting at around 1kHz and cutting at 820Hz sounded strangely pleasing to the ear. When all the bands were set to around 1k, then boosted, it yielded a very odd response – odd in that it didn't sound like you might think it should.

Using the Massivo to tidy up some masters for a CD production was easy. We made light work of a slightly dodgy mix by rolling off a little of the real low-end rumble with the filters, then tightening up the audible bass with a narrow-shaped bell EQ curve, followed by a slight boost at around 3k9 to give presence to the vocal. You really need to keep bypassing the Massivo when you're using it, because it becomes very hard to hear what it's doing at times.

As the manual warns, it's no good looking at the settings on the front panel to see what you've

British EQ

was creating. He says h

supreme, thanks to their use of what became

British

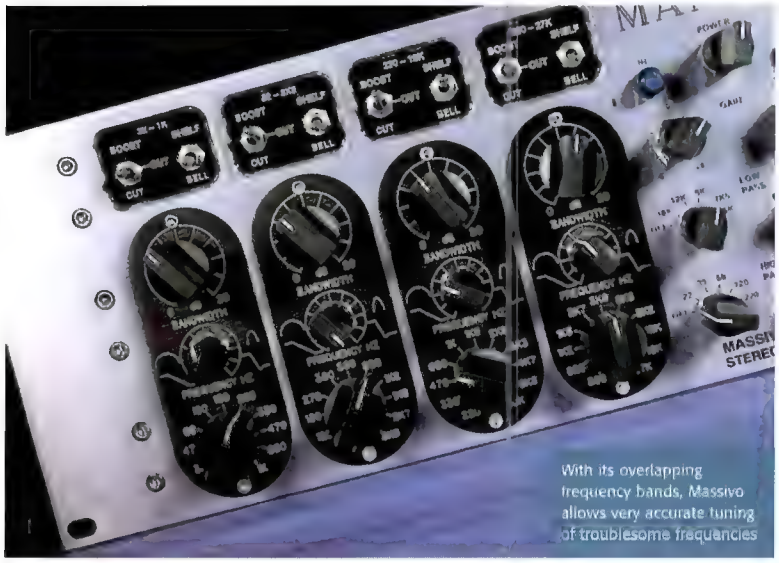
good at something.)

So what is it? It all lies in the frequencies that you are given to play with. Rupert Neve discovered that certain frequenc sound more musical and pleasing to the ear than other here are some very accurate and well-specified EQs out there that will never compete on the ame terms, simply because they work different frequency The best way to get the across is to say that has a very rounded and organic sound, while American and Japanese EQs sound kind of clinical. This may be a very sweeping statement (pun intended), and some EQs do sound but this all to the

So now we've all patted ourselves on the back, we back to marvelling uct. If EQ, then the Massive Passive is the Formula 1. It handles completely differently, but the results are awesome.

CD info

track 08
Here it is in all its glory – have a listen to the Formula 1 of EQ units


With its overlapping frequency bands, Massivo allows very accurate tuning of troublesome frequencies

specifications

I/O
Balanced XLR, balanced/unbalanced 1/4" jacks

Frequency response
8Hz-60kHz

THD & noise
- .06% (1kHz@+4dBm)

S/N
120dB typical

High-pass filters
22, 39, 68, 120, 220Hz

Low-pass filters
18, 12, 9, 7.5, 6kHz

Low switched frequencies
22, 33, 47, 68, 100, 150, 220, 330, 470, 680Hz, 1kHz

Low-mid switched frequencies
82, 120, 180, 270, 390, 560 & 820Hz, 1.2, 1.8, 2.7 & 3.9kHz

High-mid switched frequencies
220, 330, 470 & 680Hz, 1, 1.5, 2.2, 3.3, 4.7, 6.8 & 10kHz

High switched frequencies
560 & 820Hz, 1.2, 1.8, 2.7, 3.9, 5.6, 8.2, 12, 18 & 27kHz

Cut/boost
20dB

Q range
1.5-3

» done. It'll never sound like you're expecting it to.

On a mixing session, we inserted the Massivo into two channels on the desk and tried it out on both the kick drum and the main vocal. Using some pretty heavy-handed settings, the Massivo really beefed up the kick, giving it punch as well as some nice, very low 'umph'. Boosting at 180Hz and 68Hz with a narrow bandwidth on both really helped. A little boost at 1k5 lifted the 'click' right out in the mix. This may sound like over-zealous use of boost, but remember, this ain't no ordinary EQ.

Banish some of that unwanted digital sheen from your recordings with the Massive Passive filters

All present

The vocal just loved the Massive Passive. With a little boost at 3k3 for presence and a shelving cut at around 120Hz, things sounded great. The filters got rid of the unwanted sheen from the digital signal, which becomes more apparent the more valve gear you use.

One of the great things about this EQ is that you can do some really strange stuff to the sound, but it always sounds musical. So much gear has loads of features or memory dedicated to making the kind of sounds you're never going to use in the studio, but the Massivo really comes across as a creative tool. The way it manipulates sound is inspiring.

Anyone using loops to create music should definitely check this out. You can filter out the crap you don't want, and boost the bits you do, and the result is always smooth, not harsh as with most desk EQs. You can turn a weedy kick drum into a cone-splattering monster with relative ease; you can even overdrive it and re-sample it. The ability to siphon off the parts of a loop you want is great. Because the frequency bands overlap, you can really go to town on the parts that you need to cut or boost. This does away with the need for chaining EQs together to get your sound.

A neat trick that will give a new slant to your mixing is to patch a couple of stereo EQs over some sub-groups. The Manley is great for this. If you sub-group the drums and bass together, and then the guitars and keys, or even a group of loops, you get much more control than you would if you used it over the entire mix. This often works if you have an over-busy instrumental track where you need to make some space for a vocal.

There aren't really any criticisms to make of this EQ. Some of the switches make an audible 'click' when used, but this has been noted by Manley and will be fixed in future batches.

Verdict

It's been a long time since an EQ really brought on a bad case of gear lust, but the Massive Passive has. The general rule of thumb these days is to not use EQ unless absolutely necessary, and then to use it sparingly. The Massivo contradicts all the advice and breaks all the rules, and it's a good thing to see. Greatness never came out of sticking to the rules or doing what we're told.

Its appeal is huge. The quality means it would be an excellent addition to a mastering set-up. Studios should make sure this is on their shopping list in Y2K, and purveyors of sample-based music should listen to what it could do for their sound. Even live engineers could benefit from the precise control offered by the Massive Passive.

The obvious downside is the price. Then again, there aren't really any alternatives. Massenburg and Pultec, although great and equal in audio quality, can't really compete in the creative stakes. The Massive Passive isn't really trying to compete with these anyway – it's another tool altogether. So save up, sell your granny, sell your body and buy one. You won't regret it.

More from: Raper & Wayman, Unit 3, Crusader Estate, 167 Hermitage Road, Manor House, London N4 1LZ Tel: 0181 800 8288
Web: www.manleylabs.com

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AKG C3000B

Cardioid condenser microphone

Price £299

For Looks knockout › Suspension mount comes as standard › Good overall sound quality

Against The crummy box that it comes in › Some top-end sibilance if too close to the mic › Your friends might steal it

Verdict A lovely, versatile mic with that AKG character

On a recent visit to a London radio station it was interesting to note that most of the studios resembled home set-ups. That's not a criticism by any means, it just goes to show how much smaller things are becoming – no wisecracks Ed, please! Space is at a premium these days and so even the big businesses of the media world need to get as much as possible out of the room available.

Not surprisingly, there were about five individual studios in the building: one for sports broadcasts, another for recording live bands, a news room and so on. The visit involved an acoustic set being pre-recorded in a small room containing a DAT, a Yamaha 02R, a MiniDisk, two mics and a bit of outboard gear in racks. Now here comes the surprise – the two mics consisted of a pair of AKG C3000s. That's certainly not to say AKG are substandard – they've made classics such as the C451 and the more widely-known C414 ULS in its various forms, but one would have thought that Neumann mics would be used as these seem to be the most widely used and abused microphones in the radio world.

Nope it was AKG C3000s, one for vocals and one for the guitar. These were whacked into the 02R and sounded absolutely fantastic, and the engineer commented on the quality for the money. The people concerned are probably pleased to hear of the newly-revised version of the very same mic, this time called the C3000B – bet they thought long and hard to come up with that name!

Overview

If you don't know what the original C3000 looks like then perhaps an explanation wouldn't go amiss. Firstly it looks a little like a 414 but with rounder curves and a more streamlined appearance. The original came in a gunmetal grey colour, not particularly impressive actually, but the new one looks the business in a metallic silver finish – very eye-catching with the familiar logo on the front. Also, the new version has a set polar pattern as opposed to the original, which was switchable between hypercardoid and cardioid. The C3000B is optimized for cardioid performance. The pre-attenuation pad is also ahead of the preamp for an actual -10dB increase in SPL capability.

To look at, it's everything a large-diaphragm condenser should be – almost a poser's mic. It comes in a cardboard box, which is a bit of a letdown, seeing as the older models had a plastic case that was really hard-wearing. There's no such luck this time, just a large foam-filled cardboard box. A bonus, however, is that you get the shockmount as standard – a very well-made plastic affair with a great quick lock/unlock mechanism that makes adjustment a doddle.

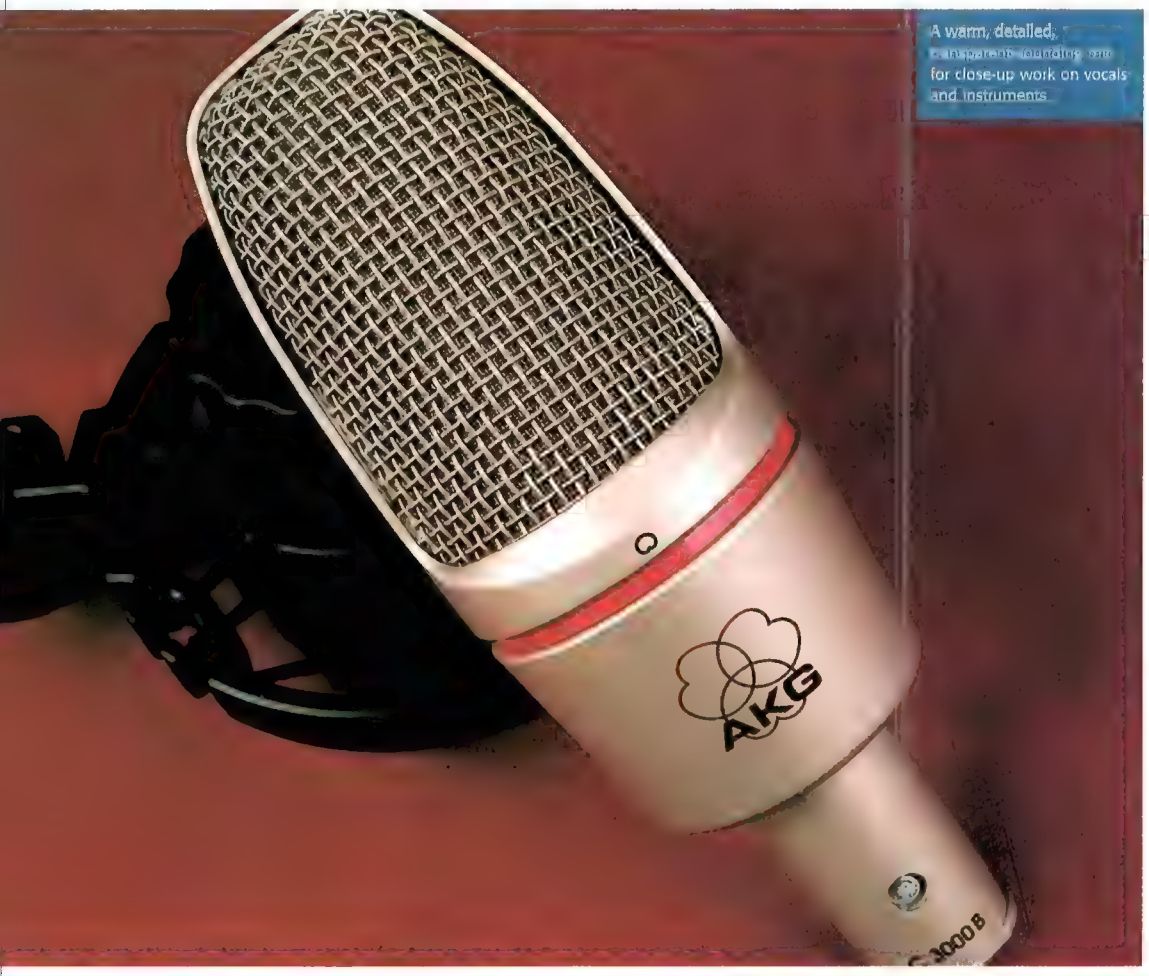
The mic itself contains all the experience that AKG have mustered over the years. Inside the 2-layer heavy-duty body lies the active Mylar foil 1" diaphragm in 6 micron-thick gold... very nice – not that it's advisable to break open the mic for closer inspection, you understand. This diaphragm is much the same as those that are found in the other ranges of AKG microphones, so expect a great sound.

Protecting this from all those spitting singers, while also serving to isolate the capsule from electrostatic interference, is a 3mm thick internal windscreen behind a heavy-duty wire grille. The capsule itself is placed in an internal suspension cradle that not only reduces unwanted knocks, but also damps off those real low resonant frequencies.

A lot of protection is needed for such a delicate piece of kit and AKG have not cut any corners in this department. Of course, it goes without saying that the electronics are also of the highest standard, but that side is best left alone because it will only get boring.

So, we have a good-looking mic with a nice spec. The frequency range is from 20-20,000Hz as one would expect, and you get the useful extras of low frequency rolloff for eliminating proximity effects, which

words
Seb Pecchia
images
Louise Broom



A warm, detailed, [illegible] for close-up work on vocals and instruments

specifications

Polar pattern
Cardioid

Frequency range
20Hz-20kHz

Impedance
100Ω

High-pass filter
6dB/octave below 500Hz

Pad
-10dB switchable

Dynamic range
126dB

Power
9-52V

Weight
320g

works at around 6dB per octave below 500Hz. There's also a -10dB pad for those applications where the general SPL is very high. Both these switches are neatly tucked away on each side of the mic and won't catch or break on anything. There's no pattern selection, but this is one of the small sacrifices we have to make to get a good mic at a good price. You'll be hard-pushed to need anything other than the straightforward cardioid pattern anyway, and if you do, then get something designed for that job. The C3000B is really for close-up work on vocals and instruments.

In use

The C3000B worked well on electric guitar amps and drum overheads, but it performed best on vocals, acoustic guitars and wind instruments. It takes 48V phantom power, so make sure you have the capability before buying one or you'll have to fork out for the B18 power supply.

Generally the detail was excellent, and very warm throughout the spectrum of sound, and the pick-up was great. The shockmount was effective in cutting out that tapping-foot syndrome, but don't rely on it. The low-cut switch came into its own when there was some over-zealous acoustic guitar playing that produced booming – one flick of the switch and it was history. We found that simply with a trial-and-error approach to positioning a great sound could be achieved, so always be prepared to experiment with a mic like this.

The final test was to use the C3000B to record some dubs for a talking book company. The problem was that nobody knew what microphone had been used originally. The C3000B fitted in like a glove and with some gentle EQ and compression it matched up seamlessly. The male voice was striking to say the least, maybe a little crisp at the top end of the spectrum, but in a way that helped the detailing of the sound.

Verdict

If you liked the original C3000, you're gonna love this. The build quality screams AKG at you, it looks fantastic in the shockmount, and the sound is warm yet transparent. On the downside, the cardboard box is a let-down given that so much effort has been put into the protective systems on the mic itself. Watch out for the top end, especially if your artist likes to sing right up on the mic – ask politely for them to move off and explain that the C3000B can do some of the hard work for them.

More from: Arbiter Group, Wilberforce Road, London NW9 6AX Tel: 0181 970 1909
Web: www.arbitergroup.com

Sony DRE-S777

Sampling digital reverb

Price £4,288 (see box, below)

For Convincingly realistic reverb sounds › Expandable library of 'sampled' spaces › Simple editing of the two main parameters

Against Large size › EQ editing not intuitive

Verdict The first commercially available 'sampling reverb' processor sounds just great

When samplers arrived on the scene they stole some of the synthesizers' thunder by providing not just a modelled approximation of the sound of a particular instrument, but the actual sound of that instrument, introducing a new degree of reality and a freshness of approach. Sony are making similar claims for this new reverb unit, a 'Sampling Digital Reverberator' that aims to provide real samples of the reverb generated in an acoustic space rather than the 'synthesized' simulations produced by the current generation of digital reverb units. Sony point out that the DRE-S777 produces far more convincing reverb than most, by faithfully capturing the early reflections and complex reverberant tails of acoustic environments that had previously only been approximated.

To achieve this, the S777 uses an advanced process called 'convolution' that allows audio signals to be combined with sample data taken from real-world acoustic spaces. This convolving requires an immense amount of DSP, which, until recently, has been beyond the power of standalone reverb units. It is now possible with a new Sony DSP, developed for the DRE-S777, with 1,000 times the processing power of previous designs.

A design of this nature is going to stand or fall on the realism of its sampled sounds, so accurately recording the correct sound of the reverb in the chosen spaces was paramount. To this end, Sony's engineers embarked on the (still ongoing) task of painstakingly collecting their sample data by recording the reverb triggered by a test signal in some of the world's most highly-regarded acoustic spaces, including concert halls, churches and studios.

The sampling system used required the use of a large PA to emit the test signal, which was then recorded by microphones arrayed in various positions, each corresponding to a variation of the reverb that would be offered by the DRE-S777 (see *Recording the Ambience*, p.50). A 24-bit recording system was used for the highest possible fidelity, and bearing in mind how much the choice of microphones and their placement can affect any recording, seasoned recording engineers were employed to choose microphone types, their directivity and placement.

This involved setting precise angles and distances from the PA, with each acoustic space being sampled across a wide range of conditions for ultimate flexibility. The sampled reverb for the DRE-S777 is not stored internally, but on CD-ROMs that contain samples of a series of different acoustic environments. One CD comes supplied with the unit, and others will be made commercially available over a period of time, as and when new acoustic environments are sampled. Multiple DRE-S777's can be combined to provide complex surround reverbs.

Overview

The first thing that strikes you about the S777 is the sheer size and weight of the the thing. It tips the scales at 15kg (over 33lb) and extends backwards a massive 50cm (almost 20") from the front panel to the rear end of the large sharp-finned heatsink fixed to the back panel. All the connections are neatly laid out here, and comprise various analogue, digital and MIDI sockets on the fully-loaded review model we tested. In its basic form the unit is configured as a mono in/stereo out digital unit and comes without converters and associated analogue outputs.

Standard equipment consists of an AES/EBU digital input on one XLR alongside two XLR digital outputs. Two XLR analogue inputs can be added by installing the optional DABK-S701 A-D converter board and there is provision for adding two of the optional DABK-S702 D-A converter boards, each of which has two XLR

CD info

track 09-10
Presets from the *European Halls and Churches* and standard CDs supplied with the DRE-S777

prices

- DRE-S777 basic unit: £4,288
- DABK-S701 A-D converter board: £763
- DABK-S702 D-A converter board: £529
- DABK-S703 DSP upgrade: £1,526

words **Trevor Curwen** images **Simon Dodd**

An new era in reverb begins with the S777's sampled acoustic spaces

analogue outputs, providing four channels in a fully-loaded unit. The converters are extremely well-specified and can be used independently purely for stereo A-D and D-A conversion if required.

To take full advantage of the unit's capabilities, more DSP power is needed in the form of the DABK-S703 DSP upgrade. The basic S777 only supports a mono in/stereo out mode, but with the extra DSP installed several more modes are available, including stereo in/stereo out, split mono (2 x mono in/stereo out), 96kHz mono in/stereo out, and mono in/4-channel out for surround.

Word Sync in and out is catered for by two BNC connectors and there is an RS-232C port for diagnostic and maintenance purposes. Two MIDI sockets, an In and an Out/Thru, are also present, although they are not yet implemented in the current software.

User interface

The front panel is an exercise in elegant minimalism. Everything is mounted on a shiny woodgrain panel of indeterminate origin that at first glance would not disgrace the dashboard of a Jaguar. Aside from the power switch, CD tray and memory card slot, the only controls are a large silver data-entry dial and an array of four 'soft' buttons set under the large green LCD display panel.

The first button, F1, scrolls between the S777's three basic menus: Reverb, Mixer and Setup. The Reverb page is the main display page and features a large pictorial representation of the type of reverb loaded – a hall is represented by a piano in the middle of a stage, while a church is represented by …er… a picture of a church. Nice one, Sony. One assumes that a drawing of a large grey box would have looked a little odd, so a plate is represented by Japanese writing that presumably says 'plate', but without a dictionary that's just an inspired guess.

To the left of the pictogram are the input meters, and to the right is a diagram to represent the particular speaker placement and miking arrangement used to sample the particular space (see *Recording the Ambience*, p.50). The bottom two rows of the display show the specifics of the reverb, including the reverb's name (Medium Hall A, Church B, Plate A…), the speaker/mic setup (C12, L12…) and the adjustable pre-delay and reverb times. Also shown in the display is the program configuration (Mono, Stereo, Surround...) and whether the signal is reverb only or has dry sound mixed in.

In the Reverb page the F2 button is used for loading reverb programs into memory, while the F3 and F4 buttons are used to select respectively Pre-delay and Reverb Time for editing with the data wheel.

Other sonic adjustments are taken care of in the mixer menu, using the F2, F3, and F4 buttons and the data wheel to scroll through and adjust the three pages that provide various EQ options for the »

specifications

DRE-S777

Variable reverb time
(0.3-6.0 secs max)

Variable predelay
(0-0.5 secs)

4-band parametric EQ
99 presets

AES/EBU input
2 x AES/EBU outputs

DABK-S701 A/D converter

Inputs
2 x XLR analogue

Dynamic range
110dB

DABK-S702 D/A converter

Outputs
2 x XLR analogue

Dynamic range
110dB

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Provides the capabilities to record with ultra wide range 24-bit A/D and D/A converters with selectable dbx Type IV™ soft-knee limiting on every input channel to simulate tape compression and provide 4dB of improved headroom

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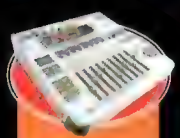

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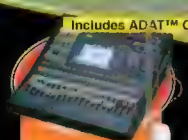

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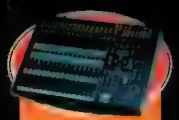

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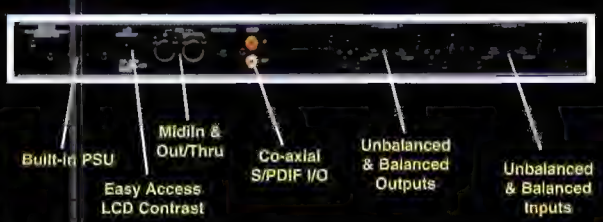

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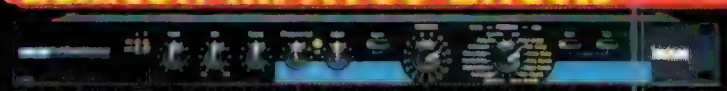

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outputs, as well as wet/dry mix adjustments and input gain tweaks. The first page covers the wet and dry sound level adjustments as well as the master (dry+wet) sound level and options for muting all three.

Equalisation is carried out on the second page and can be applied to the wet, dry or input sounds. Four bands of EQ are available. The high and low bands are both of the shelving type, with 12dB of cut or boost available. The high-band frequency is adjustable in the range 2kHz to 19kHz, while the low-band can be adjusted between 5Hz and 420Hz.

Wish you were there? Each hall and church algorithm has its own distinct acoustic – and there's a superb sense of realism

The two fully parametric mid-bands also have up to 12dB of cut and boost, and both have adjustable Q from 0.1 to 4.0. The bands overlap comfortably: the low-mid covers the range from 52.6Hz to 1kHz, and the high-mid covers from 648Hz to 12.3kHz.

The third menu page is simply for adjusting the input trim levels of both channels in a range from -6dB to 6dB.

The Setup menu addresses all of the S777's basic housekeeping functions, including input modes, loading and saving, and selecting reverb mixes

The third menu, Setup, addresses all of the S777's basic housekeeping functions like ejecting the CD and memory stick, loading and saving, setting the digital clock and MIDI channel, and adjusting the LCD display. Also found within the Setup pages are the important functions of selecting the reverb input/output mode from the various mono/stereo/4 channel variations, and selecting between reverb only or a direct/reverb mix for each pair of channels.

The diagram on the right represents the miking and speaker arrangements used to record the ambience of the particular reverb in use

All of the reverb programs are stored on a CD-ROM that comes supplied with an associated memory stick, which slots (via an adapter) into the S777s front panel PCMCIA memory card slot. The memory stick holds 4Mb of memory and has a two-fold purpose – to enable the CD-ROM licence and to store parameter settings, with 99 locations provided for user-edited program set-ups, the first seven of which are factory installed presets.

The S777 has an onboard cache memory of nine program slots, into which reverb programs can be loaded from the supplied CD. A different set-up of nine programs can be stored in each of the 99 preset locations.

In use

Turn on the S777 and nothing seems to happen save for a message saying 'please wait for few minutes' (sic) coming up on the screen. After about a minute you are prompted to insert a CD-ROM and press any key, at which point the whole machine starts whirring, presumably loading the disc data. After about another minute you are prompted to insert the memory stick, at which point the machine starts whirring again and completes the loading process.

Of course, if the CD and memory stick are already inserted, the process is a little quicker and the S777 will automatically load the last configuration of the nine cache memories used. Once all this is taken care of, you're up and running and in a position to select a reverb program. These can be quickly scrolled through using the data wheel, with only a slight glitching as the transition is completed.

Should you wish to load another program into one of the nine memory slots, it's a simple matter of hitting the F2 button, scrolling through the possible programs with the data wheel and hitting the F2 button again to initiate loading of the selected program from the CD, which takes a few seconds. It's not possible to mix your input/output modes among the nine programs – they all have to be of one type (say mono in/stereo out) – so the first task when setting up the S777 from scratch really has to be to to choose the input and output configuration you are going to use from the Setup menu, or to load one of the first seven of the 99 presets, as each of these usually represents a particular input and output configuration.

Once this has been decided upon, the only programs you can load into memory are for that particular configuration. The number of possible reverb programs for each configuration varies due to the miking and speaker combinations that can be utilised for a particular configuration. For example, with the supplied CD, there are six variations of Medium Hall A that can be used with a mono in/stereo out configuration, but only one of the same hall with a mono in/4-channel out configuration.

European Halls and Churches

European Halls and Churches is the first of the commercially available CD-ROMs to be released for the DRE-S777. Three Dutch locations have been sampled: Westerkerk, Concertgebouw (large), and Concertgebouw (small), all in Amsterdam. Germany is represented by a hall, Konzerthaus, and a church, Jesus-Christus-Kirche, both in Berlin. The set of seven is completed by Vienna's Grosser Musikvereinssal and St Vincente de Cardona, in Cardona, Spain.

The CD booklet provides a diagram of the mic placement used to capture the sound of the reverb in all the cases. In all, ten mics were used, five cardioid and five omni-directional (see diagram on p. 50), giving many more options for variations of the reverb than were possible with the four mics used to record the ambience samples for the CD-ROM that comes as standard with the S777. 12 mono in/stereo out variations are available corresponding to the following speaker/mic arrangements: C12, L12, R12, C56, L56, R56, C78, L78, R78, C9A, L9A, and R9A. Stereo in/stereo out has five possible variations: LR12, LR56, LR34, LR78 and LR9A, while there are three possible mono in 4-channel out variations C1256, C1234 and C789A.

With all these variations available, 5-channel in/5-channel out surround sound can be achieved by stacking up three S777's, and if four machines are stacked, 5-channel in/5-channel can be achieved with a full matrix of reverb.

The next disc in the series will include American samples and will feature the reverb from several leading studios including Avatar, Ocean Way, Enterprise and The Hit Factory. Also included will be the sound of the Grand Canyon and there will be even more scope for complex surround sound reverb arrays due to the new speaker/microphone configurations to be used.

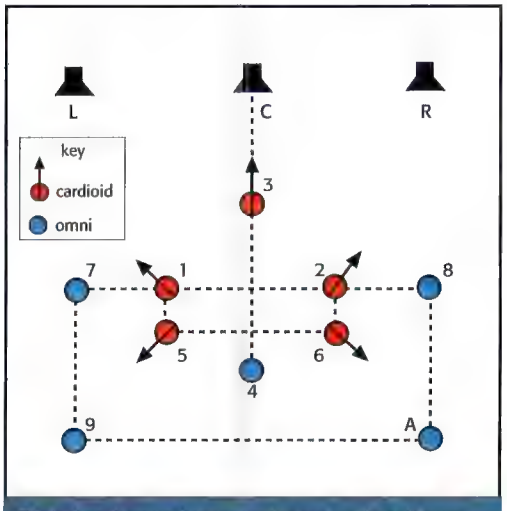
Recording the ambience

During the design process of the S777, the choice of test signal that represented all frequencies at equal amplitudes was crucial in generating reverb that could be used in the convolution process. Sony's solution was to use a computer-generated frequency sweep 'TSP Wave', output it through a loud and accurate PA with three speaker positions left, centre and right, and record the reverb generated by each speaker.

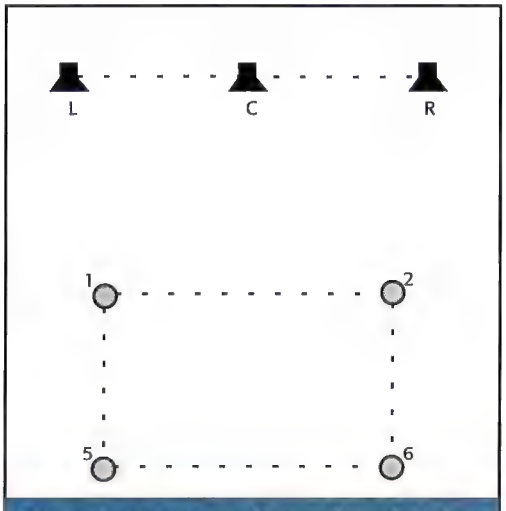
The initial samples used on the 'Halls, Churches, Studio and Plates' CD-ROM supplied with the DRE-S777 were all recorded with an array of a maximum of four microphones arranged in two pairs, 1&2 and 5&6, in front of the three speaker (L,C,R) arrangement, with mics 1&2 generally the ones picking up the most direct sound. The sound from each of the speakers was recorded by each set of mics, allowing a series of possibilities for variations of each church, hall or room reverb, representing different miking positions.

Thus, in a mono in/stereo out situation, the reverb could be generated by the centre speaker and picked up by mics 1&2, giving the C12 option, or picked up by mics 5&6 for the C56 option. Alternatively, the sound could be generated by either one of the other speakers, giving the possibilities L12, L56, R12 or R56. With a stereo in/stereo out situation, only the left and right speakers would be used, giving the options LR12 and LR56. Only one option would be available for mono in/4-channel out, which would be C1256.

For later software releases, Sony have stated their intention to use more complex mic and speaker set-ups for more surround sound variations, and, in fact, ten mics were used for the European Halls and Churches CD (see p.49).



This is the mic set-up that was used to capture the ambiences for the optional *European Halls and Churches* CD



This microphone set-up was used to create the reverbs for the CD that comes supplied with the S777

Working in a mono in/stereo out configuration, as would normally be the case working with a standard digital reverb on a single mono aux send, we auditioned all the reverbs supplied with the S777. The standard CD contains two halls, two churches, four different studio rooms and two plates, and it has to be said that the sounds are superb. Collected here are some of the most finely detailed and accurate reverb sounds heard anywhere.

The actual range of sampled spaces on the standard CD covers most bases. The studio rooms all sound sufficiently different from each other and range down from the largest room, sampled both with and without damping on the wall behind the speaker position, to a tight-sounding drum booth. The various miking positions add to the versatility, giving a range of options that accurately reflect how one would approach miking the room in a real session. The two plate reverbs seem sonically as close to the real thing as it's possible to get with a rack-mounted box, while the halls and churches exhibit all the complex reflections you would expect of such environments.

Tweaking the pre-delay and reverb times couldn't be easier, and a wide range of variation of both parameters is available. Programs load with the maximum possible reverb time and can be reduced if desired, and with zero pre-delay, which can be increased. Inveterate twiddlers might miss the lack of other parameters, but that would perhaps be missing the point – if you've gone to such lengths to recreate the exact sound of a specific space that has been chosen for its unique characteristics why mess with them?

It's true that mic choice and placement add their own flavour when capturing sound, but variations of that nature can be addressed with EQ, and there's plenty of subtle variation available onboard to tailor the sound to specific requirements. The only drawback is the soft key/data wheel method of EQ editing, which actually works OK but can be a little tedious.

Moving on to the European Halls and Churches selection, the range of variations with regard to mic positioning is wider, as more mics were used. Each of the halls and churches does have its own distinct acoustic and there's a superb sense of realism – it's very easy to imagine that you are actually standing in the building listening to the swell of complex reverb around you.

Verdict

Although convolution has been used in reverb simulation to lesser degrees by other manufacturers, the Sony DRE-S777 is the first commercially-available rack-mounted sampling reverb processor and, as such, represents a major step forward. Now there is the opportunity to add the actual ambience of a real live location to a recording, with all of the implications that brings. However, not all reverb needs to sound exactly like a real space to fulfil its function in music production, so any predictions that this new breed will see off the Lexicons of this world are far too premature – it's more likely that the two technologies will exist side by side and complement each other.

How sampled reverb will fit into the overall scheme of things in the long term remains to be seen, but the amount and variety of software available will be a big factor. It's early days yet, but it will be interesting to see exactly what other spaces Sony intend to sample; there are plenty out there, how about the Gold Star echo chambers as used by Phil Spector?

Regardless of any other considerations, the fact remains that the DRE-S777 is an excellent-sounding processor. At over four grand for the basic machine and over seven for a fully-loaded one, not to mention the cost of additional CD-ROMs, the DRE-S777 is only going to be affordable to the type of high-end studio that can afford a Lexicon 480L, but if one thing is certain in pro audio, it is that once the technology is in place it is only a matter of time before it appears in a smaller box at a lower price, and that's something we can all look forward to.

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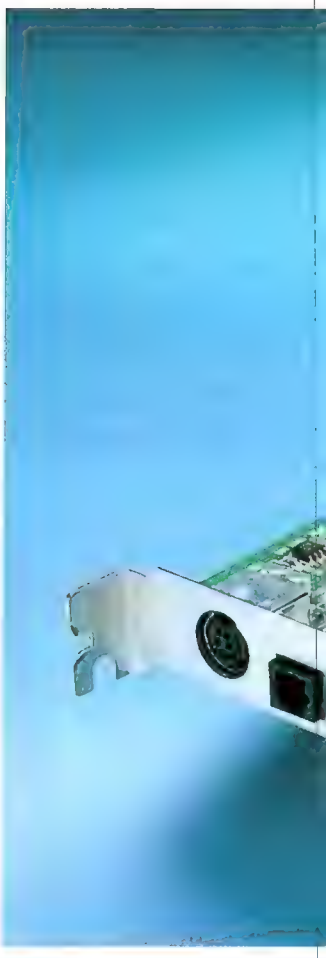


The soundcard market just gets better and better. Based for the most part on the SoundBlaster cards of yesteryear, we've gone from the humble, yet pliable AWE64 and the like to the Korg Oasys PCI soundcard that we see before us.

This is the second soundcard to come from Korg. The first was the innovative Korg 1212. This was a full-length PCI card and featured ADAT analogue and S/PDIF inputs and outputs, plus ADAT sync and Word Clock on BNC connectors. Korg, knowing a good thing when they see it, have stuck with tradition and provided almost identical connectors – the big difference being that the 1212 suffered from an anaemic lack of DSP, so provided little help to the old CPU. That is where the similarities end. The Oasys breaks down into three basic software components: audio recording, synthesis, and multi-channel effects processing.

Overview

The Oasys, unlike the 1212, has DSP of Godzilla-like proportions, integrating its audio I/O, synthesis and effects processing into a single professional PCI audio card. It's designed (for want of a better phrase) as a computer studio and can be used with any audio/MIDI sequencer.

The review was conducted on a Mac G4 and at present only Mac software is available, but we're assured that PC software is going to be available soon. Installation was, for the most part, without incident although one must be careful with this card as it's a full-length PCI card – not all PCI slots have provision for a full-length card.

The card features a total of 24 connections – 12 inputs and 12 outputs, including stereo analogue I/O, stereo S/PDIF ins and outs, and eight-channel ADAT I/O connections. All the ins and outs are 24-bit, can be used simultaneously, and connections are on breakout cables from the card itself. The S/PDIF, Word Clock and ADAT-sync lines all come from one D-type connector, while the analogue I/O comes from the DIN-to-female jack connector. There's also the obligatory ADAT lightpipe inputs and outputs.

The leads are well put-together, but at this price, a solid breakout box would have been a little more useful. Placing leads like this right out of the computer is assuming that the machine's rear-end is going to be within easy access, which, of course, is never the case in any studio.

In use

Oasys supports all major audio and MIDI programs, and it certainly worked perfectly well within Cubase with the supplied ASIO drivers.

The mixer, which acts as the front end, sits in the background providing the control for all the card's available functions. Unlike some manufacturers, Korg have made almost every parameter controllable via MIDI, allowing easy modulation and automation of mixing, synthesis, and effects from any MIDI sequencer or real-time MIDI controller. The mixer is a 12-channel affair corresponding – surprisingly – with the 12 available outputs, and each channel is capable of handling synthesis programs, audio inputs, or hard-disk audio tracks. Each channel has access to four inserts for effects, plus four auxiliary sends, each capable of addressing up to four effects, and finally, six stereo output busses, each capable of addressing up to four effects busses.

Onboard synths

This *is* a Korg product, so there are no disappointments when it comes to the synth section! This is not your average set of XG sounds here – we are talking serious modelling. Instead of burning a couple of big polyphonic synths into the operating system, Korg have opted for a totally different solution – all the synths are loaded into the Oasys card as plug-ins. This is a great concept, keeping the development of the card totally fluid and open to third-party developers.

All the synths are loaded from disk. In this manner, you are able to keep the sounds (and your not inconsiderable investment) current. The synths can, in fact, be accessed without the use of a sequencer via

system requirements

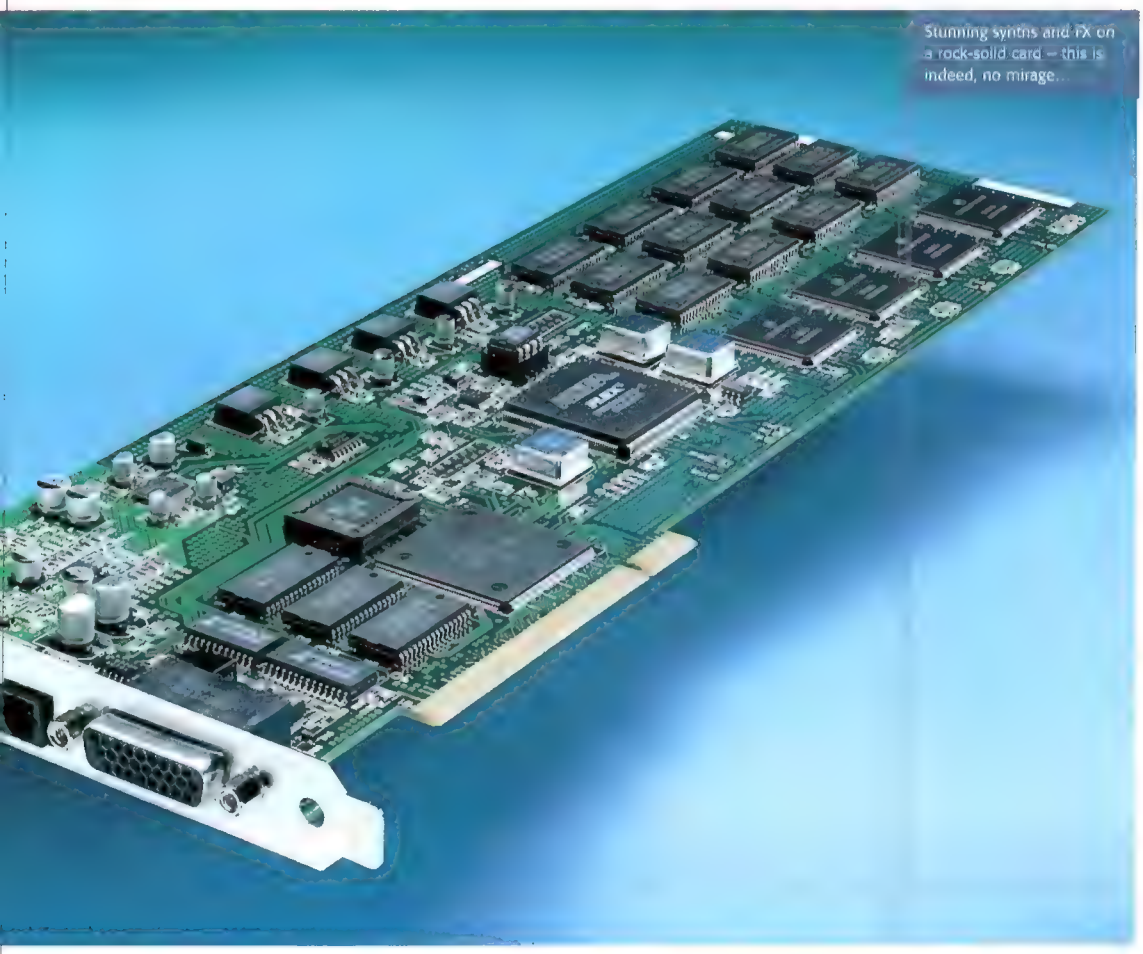
Mac

- G3 minimum, G4 recommended
- 128Mb RAM
- OS 8.6

PC:

- TBA in late spring

words **Adam Fuest**



Stunning synths and FX on a rock-solid card – this is indeed, no mirage...

OMS or Free MIDI and are, for want of a better word, stunning. There's just not enough room in this article to comment on individual sounds, but as we said before the structure is totally open, and these synths can be anything you want them to be.

The oscillators are rich, bright, and smooth, with no hint of hesitation in the sound. In fact, it made our Yamaha AN1x sound positively shy and evasive. The filters are warm and fat, with resonance extending to frequencies far above typical digital analogue filters. They're flexible too, offering a choice of poles and modes. There's also a special, fully 'modulatable' comb filter that's both spectacular and usable.

The envelopes are also worthy of a mention as they're so responsive. The fast attack response was just like an old synth – ruthlessly tight. In addition to several flexible analogue synth algorithms, allowing you to make your own balance between features and polyphony, Korg have included a few very convincing recreations of classic analogue synths and modelled instruments. These constitute the bread and butter menu and they ain't half bad.

First we have a 'Prophet Five' model, which sounded pretty damn close to the original, then we have the now obligatory 'MiniMoog' which 'rocked the big one' – it sounded fantastic and better, in our opinion, than the real thing, having just a little more grunt. What's disappointing with all these modelling synths is that they all go for the glory in the design stages. The MiniMoog is not the only monophonic analogue synth in the world. It would be great to turn on one of these synths on one day and have a cracking model of a Sequential Pro One or an ARP Odyssey, or for that matter, how about a Moog Taurus Bass Pedal!

Then there's the rather cool 'Percussion Synth', which proved hard to leave alone. Of particular note is the amazing-sounding 'Hammond B3 Organ' – it is fully polyphonic and is capable of playing 61 notes at a time, and even combined with both vibrato and rotary speaker effects, it only uses half of the Oasys' DSP.

Then we have the usual, but nonetheless exceptional, electric pianos, guitars and basses. We aren't so convinced about the guitar, but then one suspects that it's one of those instruments that can never be emulated faithfully.

The brass is very good indeed, as are the sax and flute emulations. An accomplished keyboard player could get incredible results with these sounds, and it's quite obvious from the quality and usability of sounds on this card that the days of the synth and sampler are numbered. Physical Modelling has come of age.

FX paradise

As impressive as the synthesizer features are, they are only part of what this card has to offer. The Korg Oasys has over over a hundred different effect

Competing soundcards

Although the Oasys looks unique in the position it holds, this will not be for long. Korg have been very canny with the release of this card on to the Mac platform first because within the next month or so, Creamware are going to make Mac drivers available for the Pulsar. The Pulsar, (reviewed in issue 67), is not dissimilar to the Oasys, although its allocation of DSP is a little more fluid, which is beneficial. The Pulsar does benefit from superb integration within Logic Audio, and although the graphics and user interface are a little confusing it's nonetheless a superb card and has already seduced many an artist.

As far as other soundcard options are concerned, it starts to become a little more complicated. One could look at the Modular Yamaha system, which is now well-established and extremely flexible. A Yamaha DSP2416 card with an SW1000 soundcard, an AX16 dual-channel interface board and an AN modelling plug-in board offers an extremely stable and powerful alternative, with again, superb integration with both Logic Audio and Cubase. The problem here is that it takes up at least three slots but does have many more channels and one can (allegedly) install more than one DSP2416 within a computer.

Another alternative is a card such as Soundscape's Mixtreme bundled with several soft synths and a powerful computer. You would be looking at a viable alternative but would probably end up spending a few more of those precious greenbacks.

specifications

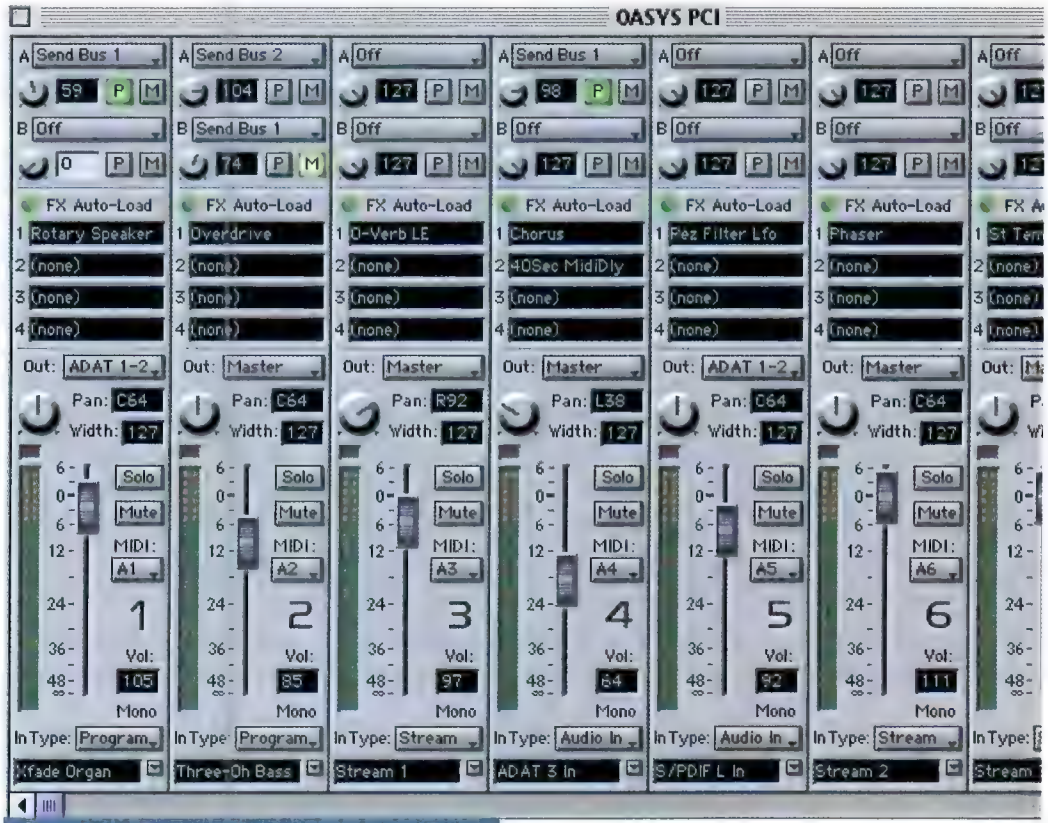
Audio and sync I/O
24-bit stereo analogue, 24-bit S/PDIF, 24-bit ADAT optical, BNC Word Clock, ADAT time-code in/out/thru

Sample rates
44.1kHz, 48kHz, external clock

Mixer channels
12
- Each may process synthesis, audio inputs, or hard-disk audio tracks

FX
100+ algorithms
- 4 effects may be used simultaneously on the channel inserts, the 4 sends, and the 6 stereo output busses (DSP permitting)

Compatibility
- PCI 2.1-compliant
- Audio I/O supports ASIO on Mac/PC (and soon standard Windows audio I/O)
- MIDI supports OMS, Free MIDI, (and soon standard Windows MIDI)



The mixer may look daunting at first, but along with the various editors, it makes for a fluid and easy-to-use interface

algorithms, most of them based upon those found in the Korg Trinity. For instance, in addition to the standard chorus effect, there is an harmonic chorus, and a step chorus with rhythmic transitions, sounding not dissimilar to the subtle Vector Transition (cycling between waveforms, as per Korg Wavestation and Prophet VS).

There's also a 2-band chorus with independent processing for high and low frequencies, 4 and 6-tap multi-tap chorus/delays, a bi-phase modulator with dual LFOs, and an ensemble effect.

There's a good selection of the weird stuff as well, with effects like the talking modulator, which processes any signal through sweeping, dynamic vowel shapes. The decimator adds lo-fi grunge, there's doppler-shifters, flangers and phasers with triggered envelopes, MIDI-sync'd LFOs, and a rather nice MIDI gate with full envelope control, which saves all that velocity programming for those gated effects – and this is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

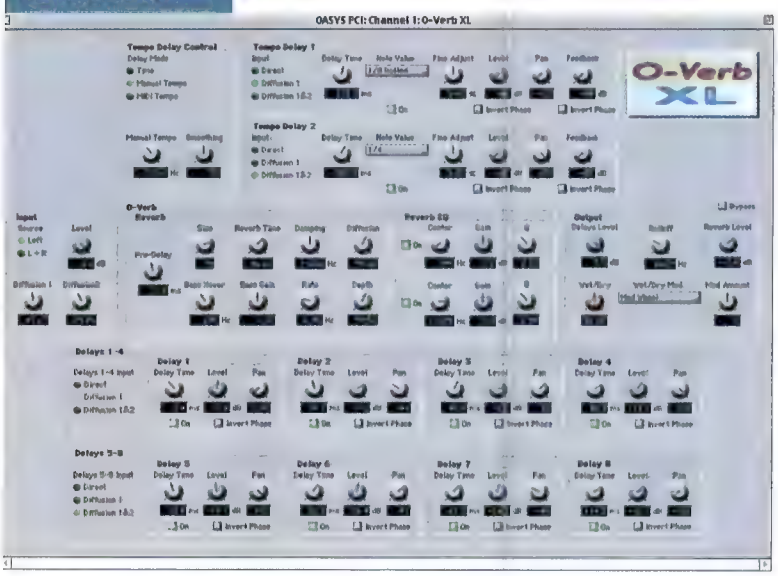
We have overdrives, amp simulations, auto-wahs, resonators, delays, vibratos, autopanners, early-reflections, the rotary-speaker from the Korg ToneWorks G4, a sub-oscillator, a ring modulator, dynamic exciter, stereo enhancer, classic organ-style chorus/vibrato, and multi-band limiter.

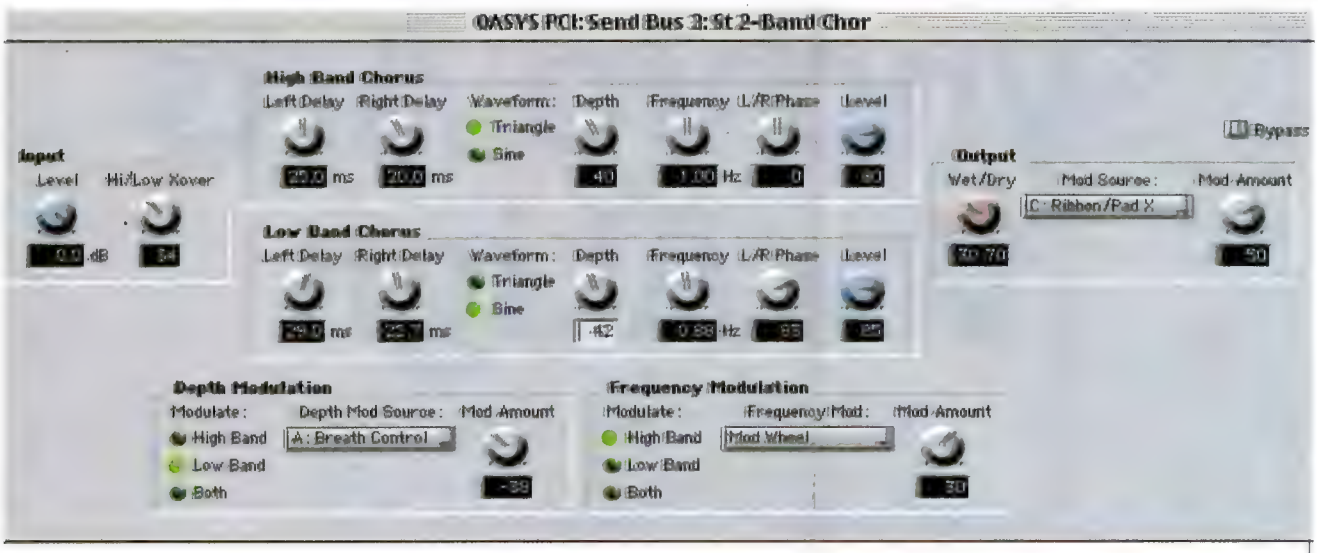
Then we come onto some of the really tasty effects, like the MIDI sync'd-tempo delays. The LFO effects are chorus, flanger, phaser, resonant filters, auto-pan, tremolo, and vibrato, and all are available with MIDI-synced tempo LFOs. The standard tempo LFO features six different basic waveforms, with continuous adjustment between logarithmic, linear, and exponential shapes, as well as 'parametrised smoothing', all of which can be modulated in real-time.

And then we have the Multi-Mode Resonant Filter Effects. These are basically Korg's synth filters made accessible to real-time audio, so you can use multi-pole resonant filter effects, all locked and triggered from audio, which is a vast improvement over the standard filter plug-ins that seem to proliferate at the moment.

Of worthy note are the new Korg reverbs and EQs.

A more comprehensive reverb/delay page is hard to find, and it's all recordable over MIDI





Amongst the handful of choruses is the 2-band, with independent high and low-frequency processing

The reverbs, although not up to the standard of those from Wave Mechanics or TC, are not bad at all. The tails of the reverbs are smooth, and the early reflections are convincing, especially when you consider that they don't require any DSP from you main CPU. The EQ on the Korg sounded pleasant, and not dissimilar to the 'Fat EQ' in Logic.

Verdict

The Oasys can only be described as rock-solid. There's no crashes to report, the sounds available are, as you might have gathered, excellent, and the quality of the audio effects is simply superb, leading us onto the next question – what *is* this card, anyway?

Are we looking at the first complete studio on a card? Well, if you're working alone and are happy to work from a screen all the time, this may well be the studio on a card you've been looking for. When we asked Korg about using multiple Oasys, they suggested it might become possible further down the line, so there are potentially limits to how many inputs and outputs one can have with this system. We shall have to see when the Windows-based software becomes available, with Windows being so much more flexible with multiple multimedia cards.

As a synthesizer, again, it's superb, and used in conjunction with the mixer and individual outputs, it's worth every penny. We would be very happy to have this little fella sitting in our computer and as a synth and FX unit one would undoubtedly use it every day. It is to Korg's credit that they have not only made this card, but have constructed an effective and intuitive interface to deal with some very complex features.

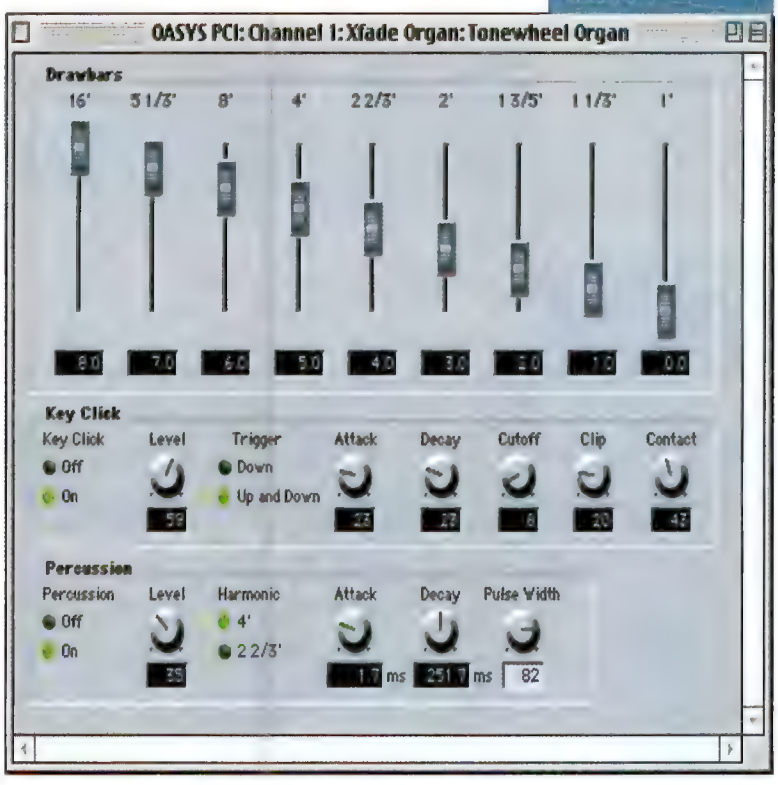
The mixer interface and the various editor windows make a system that is both fluid and remarkably easy to use. At present, the Oasys offers the Mac user, and hopefully soon the PC user, a ground-breaking product.

On the downside, the restrictions posed by the ADAT connections – although small – are a little annoying. On paper the ins and outs look fine, but in practice, many people don't have ADAT optical interface, so in real terms once you have connected your DAT or MiniDisk to the S/PDIF port you only have two channels of analogue I/O. Put like that, it's not so impressive. ADAT-to-analogue converters are a possibility, but good ones don't come cheap and the purchase of one would hike up the overall package price considerably.

So there you have it – apart from a few gripes this is probably the best soundcard in the world.

More from: Korg (UK) Ltd, 9 Newmarket Court, Kingston, Milton Keynes, MK10 0AU
Tel: 01908 857100 Web: www.korg.co.uk

The polyphonic organs use only half of Oasys' DSP, even with vibrato and rotary speaker FX



Synchro Arts VocALign

Audio alignment AS plug-in

Price £347

For Easy-to-use interface › Lots of features other than aligning audio › Gets your harmonies as tight as the Bee Gees' pants

Against Can sound unnatural at times

Verdict A great time-saver that can really make the difference to those backing vocals and instrumental layers

words
Seb Pecchia

CD info

track 01
Tame those unruly backing vocals – a VocALign demo is on the cover CD

Some things save us time, some things save us money, and although Synchro Arts' VocALign software was originally designed for film and video production, the new plug-in version will – believe it or not – be a winner for the makers of music too. How many times have you re-done takes of vocals, especially backing vocals, desperately attempting to get all the harmonies as tight as possible? Too many to mention, probably. It's a tiring and time-consuming exercise, and in this game time is money.

Up until now you may well have wished that with the flick of a switch the words and phrasing would blend seamlessly. Since we've been able to 'see' sound as wave data, things have been easier to a certain extent, because you can shift that wave data around, cut and paste it and get it all tidy, but for the chaps at Synchro Arts this wasn't enough. So they've developed the VocALign plug-in.

Overview

We met the inventor of this plug-in about a year ago in a London studio and he ran the early demo of it for us. He explained that the original intention of VocALign was to solve the problems that post-production studios have with lip-synching on film and video, but he hoped it would be useful in other applications.

Sure enough, it's now used for all kinds of applications, from foreign language dubbing to double-tracking vox or instrumental sections, synching a drum machine up to a real drummer or changing the sex of the singer. Yes, sex. So if you like the idea of having a female vocal on your backing track but no female vocalists on hand, then this plug-in will give the male vox female characteristics.

To run VocALign you need Pro Tools 5 (or higher), and a Mac fast enough to deal with it. The software is an Audio Suite plug-in so it will appear in that nice familiar environment we all love. (This is only for PT5 and LE users though, so if you have an older version of Pro Tools then you'll only be able to use the standalone program that comes as part of the £699 VocALign Pro package.)

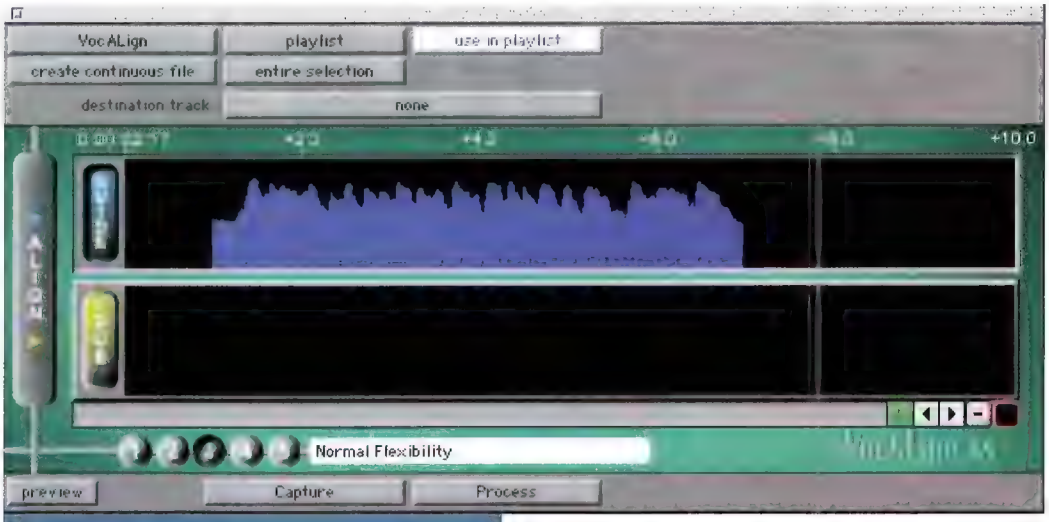
VocALign AudioSuite waiting patiently for some out-of-sync vocals to be thrown its way

In use

Learning to use this software is very easy, and only takes a few minutes – there are no lengthy manuals to sift through. Operation is simple: first, select the audio you wish to use as the guide (the audio you are going to match to), then select the dub (the audio you want to match to the guide).

Once you have done this, select VocALign from the AudioSuite menu in Pro Tools, and the plug-in will appear. Make sure that 'use in playlist' is showing on the toolbar, click 'guide' on the left of the window, then 'capture' and you'll see your guide waveform appear in the top of the plug-in window. Then do the same with 'dub' and the same will happen, but the wave will appear in the bottom half of the window.

Next, simply press 'align' to check visually for the alignment and have a good look, and preview if you wish. Then just select a source for the new aligned audio and hit 'process'. It takes seconds and does the



Step 1: First you need to capture the guide audio that all other audio will be matched with

job very well indeed. It's simple, really.

A word of caution, though – leave a couple of seconds of silence before and after when selecting audio, as this allows the noise floor to set properly and makes for accurate alignment at the start of the signal. It's also worth noting that the audio can't be longer than two minutes or less than 0.25 secs in duration, a small price to pay for accurate alignment of those precious backing vocals.

Another good thing about this plug-in is that it takes no notice of the dub's timecode position in Pro Tools – it only needs the guide's, as this is the audio that you are matching to.

Other features allow the user to adjust the selected audio region within VocALign itself, without the need to flick back into the Pro Tools window, and of course you can align multiple takes by recapturing one of the signals without effecting the other, allowing multiple takes to be matched to each other over and over. There's good access to functions such as time compression and expansion, which can stop unnatural effects from happening – using the 'low flexibility' setting on the drop-down menu usually solves the problem.

Verdict

All this may sound a bit foreign to music producers who are unfamiliar with terms such as 'dubbing', 'guiding' and 'capture'. But don't let it put you off. When you install the VocALign CD-ROM there is an excellent tutorial that actually shows you the stages and ways of using this tool to the max. For those in the music scene this is fantastic. If you're into post-production, you may want to look at VocALign Pro, which comes with both the AS and standalone versions.

The sex change feature is very interesting and could be used imaginatively, but don't expect to have Barry White sing into a mic and then make him sound like Dolly Parton – he won't. Also remember that you need to be reasonable with this software – it's not going to give you great results if you're trying to match two very different pieces of audio together – but then why would you want to?

What it *will* do is make life faster. It stops the hassle of patching up backing vox, or worse, having to get session singers back in because the vocals aren't tight enough. Stick them through this plug-in and the results are fantastic – you can match up some very out-of-sync audio that once upon a session would have had to be trashed.

More from: Synchro Arts Limited, 13 Links Road, Epsom, Surrey KT17 3PP Tel: 01372 811934 Web: www.synchroarts.co.uk

system requirements

- Protools 5 or LE to use the AS version
- Application program only can be used for older Pro Tools versions
- Format: comes on a CD-ROM with authorization from floppy disk, so you'll need a USB floppy drive

Step 2: Capturing the dub audio. Notice how the two waveforms don't match up, so when played back the vocals are all over the shop

Finished! VocALign has matched the waveforms and even allowed for the different lengths of the audio being processed, both audio tracks now locked together as well as hard to spot

ATC SCM20A

Active nearfield monitors

Price £3,049

For Superb sound › Rock-solid stereo image › Overload protection › Cool carrying pods

Against Very heavy › Reassuringly expensive

Verdict In a smallish room, these could be all you need for quality tracking and mixing. Bass-heads may want the optional sub-woofer

Monitors: they woof, they tweet, and they shake the very air you breathe into a complex ocean of waves that break on dark shores deep inside your brain, enabling you to hear the most beautiful of all sounds... your music.

Unfortunately, when the woman from the record company presses play on the office hi-fi, you can't hear the vocal, just the reverb, and there's so much bass that she can't turn it up past one and a half. This may be because one of her speakers is on top of the other, providing a stand for the yukka plant. A more likely explanation is that you have crappy monitors in your studio.

If you're serious about your music then these problems can be remedied. With a bit of ingenuity you can improve the worst of rooms, and these days – for the price of a decent synth module – you can have a high-quality monitoring system, like the Mackie 824, Genelec 1029A, or KRK V6 or V8. But, for the price of two – maybe three – synth modules, you could even have a pair of ATCs.

Overview

If you've not heard of ATC then you probably haven't been to Abbey Road, Real World or any BBC recording studios, and that's just in this country. The ATC global client list is certainly impressive. They boast a unique combination of components and solutions to some basic loudspeaker design problems, and now with the SCM20A Pro Portable Reference Monitor, these features are potentially available to all of us.

These are the smallest active monitors yet from ATC. They are designed to be portable nearfield monitors with a full bandwidth, low harmonic distortion, and a stable stereo image. This means they can produce very low frequencies, they don't make noises that they aren't supposed to, and whatever you pan to the centre 'appears' bang between the two monitors.

As for the portable bit, they come in a moulded protective shell, and each one has a handle moulded into the cabinet. Mind your back though – they weigh 30kg each!

They lack the 3" soft-dome mid-range drivers that are ATCs unofficial trademark, though. Instead there's a 25mm HF driver and a 150mm LF driver per cabinet. The die-cast aluminium cabinets look a bit like something Ming the Merciless might chase Flash Gordon in – check out the go-faster cooling fins. The rear panel has controls to tailor the LF response to your room, select the right voltage, an XLR input, the power switch and the IEC mains socket.

Heavy metal

ATC, (the Acoustic Transducer Company) began in 1974. An Australian vintage tractor enthusiast called Billy Woodman turned his engineering skills and love of jazz music into a loudspeaker design concept. Billy decided that the mid-range was the crucial part of the audible frequency spectrum (300Hz-3kHz), and after four years with Goodmans, developed the mid-range driver mentioned earlier.

Among other things, this driver had a massive magnet and set the standard for ATC loudspeaker performance. Although this ATC staple is absent from the SCM20A, both drivers employ the same design ethos. In order to accurately produce low frequencies 'time domain distortion' must be reduced. When a big sound (eg. a kick drum) hits a mechanical system it rings, much like hitting an oil drum with a hammer. This ring is called 'hangover' and greatly affects mid-range performance. The speakers must be 'damped' using a combination of structural design (to prevent internal resonance), and huge magnets, which is why it hurts like hell when you lift them.

To prevent harmonic distortion, ATC employ their 'Super-Linear' driver technology (accounting for the 'SL' logo on the front). Iron powder around the voice coils repress the eddy currents that love to run rampant in electro-magnetic systems. This is apparently an expensive process that many other manufacturers can't afford to employ, and it delivers a near perfect mid-range response.

Stable imaging is achieved with the help of two mosfet amplifiers per cabinet, i.e. a dedicated amp for

words **Steve Evans** images **Gavin Roberts**

Amazing mid-range end and crisp top end – what more could your mixing sessions require?

specifications

Drivers
HF 25mm ferro-fluid cooled LF 150mm massive magnet super linear

Frequency range
60 Hz-20 kHz

SPL
108dB@1m

Crossover frequency
2.8 kHz

Inputs
XLR, 10kΩ, balanced

LF Amp
250W

HF Amp
50W

LF EQ
+6dB@40Hz

Dimensions
448 x 270 x 310 mm

Weight
30kg per side

each driver, each employing 'phase alignment' technology. Many active monitoring systems employ 'time alignment' technology, meaning that signals reach their destinations at the right moment, relative to each other. Phase alignment means exactly the same, except that the system is adjustable to within a fraction of a cycle, thus making it deadly accurate. The amplifiers for the LF and HF drivers are rated at 250W and 50W respectively. So let's hear them, then…

In use

The ATCs were set up alongside our KRK V8 active monitors. These are not as expensive or as sophisticated as the ATCs, but it's good to do an A/B comparison in order to find out what an extra £1,500 sounds like. Both sets of monitors were placed on breeze block towers (the ATCs have universal omnimount fixings for either flying or wall mounting).

The material being worked on was a 'live'n'loops' sort of thing, giving some meaty bottom-end action as well as some dense guitar work and in this case, lots of vocals. Two things became immediately apparent.

Firstly, the ATCs don't seem to deal with some of the bassy sounds at high volume as easily as the V8s. Once the controls on the back of the ATCs had been adjusted to suit the room however, our programmer looked a bit perkier. Many active nearfield systems allow for a subwoofer to be incorporated, making »

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These are some of the best sounding 'multimedia' speakers we've ever heard. The bi-amped system has a total of 65 watts RMS amplification driving the 6.5" sub, 3.5" mids and dome tweeters. There are separate volume, bass, treble and Lift balance controls, and a very handy headphone socket. Yamaha's patented "Imersion" circuit gives an extra wide stereo effect. Features RCA + minijack ins, removable grilles and full magnetic shielding. Stocks are strictly limited as this unbelievable discount - ***first come, first served!***

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PACKAGE

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VALVE VOICE CHANNEL

ALMOST 45% OFF!

MindKrim

This channel strip accepts XLR mic, line or instrument level, and provides HPF at 50Hz or 100Hz, three band parametric EQ. The VCA compressor has a switchable sidechain HPF, and auto attack / release mode, with LED metering. Features post compressor valve makeup gain stage, for user control of colouration and even optional digital I/O. AudioMedia's David Mellor says "the sound is very, very good", whilst SOS's Hugh Robjohns says "the EnVoice is a particularly flattering and fine sounding processor". At this price, there's no excuse for not owning one - ***buy now while stocks last!***

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College of Audio Engineering

Ashley Sheinwald, student,
2 hours sleep between two recording sessions and a digital editing session.
Total duration 49 hours (not including the two hour sleep)

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Tel 020-7359-4035 Fax 020-7359-4027 E-mail info@alchemea.demon.co.uk
WebSite www.alchemea.co.uk

all the difference to the Genelec 1029A system for example, but at £3,205 the ATC SCMO 1/15" subwoofer may be out of reach for most of us.

Secondly, the mid-range response from the ATCs was a revelation. They sounded amazing. The vocal was definitely in the middle, it wasn't going anywhere, and almost followed you round the room. All of a sudden the music had more depth. Work was being done in a stable, three-dimensional soundstage, and everything became a little clearer. While not perhaps as crudely bottom-endy as our V8s, after acclimatising, the bottom-end was more revealing and more responsive to subtle changes of EQ, compression and panning. If there was any mixing to be done it was definitely going to be done on the ATCs.

Next day, after the post-mix euphoria had worn off, it was time to master the new tune and its three previously-mixed companions. This provided a good opportunity to compare the ATC mix with the V8 mixes. After half an hour of Shania Twain and the Chemical Brothers, (both of which sounded spanking through the ATCs), the previous night's work sounded pretty together, particularly the bottom end. As well as being fiercely accurate, the ATCs produce an excitingly crisp top end response. This showed up the flaws in our mix very clearly, and a little top-end EQ and soft limiting did the job nicely. The other mixes needed a bit more remedial bottom-end EQ to bring them into line. 'I wish you'd had those last weekend' was the general tone.

Verdict

The ATC SCM20A portable nearfield reference monitors are excellent, and are at their best in a smallish control room with good acoustics. If you're a serious bass-head, though, you may need a sub woofer, which might ultimately tempt you towards a cheaper system.

The nearest competition is the Spendor SA500, and these monitors are even more expensive. If you want to do proper mixes and you can scrape up £3,049, then these are probably the best off-the-shelf speakers you can get. And remember, you won't have to buy a power amp...

More from: ATC Loudspeaker Technology Limited, Gypsy Lane, Aston Down, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL6 8HR, England
Tel: 01285 760561 Web: www.atc.gb.net

£699 inc. VAT
TLM103
Neumann budget beaters
£585 inc. VAT
Neumann. No other name comes close.
And here's some remarkable news. There's now a choice of microphones bearing the proud Neumann name, but at new, surprisingly un-Neumann-like prices.
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new releases

All the major album releases of the month reviewed and rated, our snap verdicts on the best of the rest, and our classic sessions spot *Milestones*

in brief

NEIL SPARKES AND THE LAST TRIBE *Burning Mask* (Inter Chill) is by poet and painter Sparkes, and as you'd expect from a CD dedicated to Cuba, it's a well-funky hybrid of reggae, jazz, breakbeat and Afro-Cuban styles. (PS)

AIR *Virgin Suicides OST* (Virgin) This album gets the full Air treatment, with all tracks performed by the masters of French cool themselves. It's real movie soundtrack stuff with moody atmospherics, guitars and strings. Nothing unusual. (CW)

VARIOUS *Track: Dirty Warped Funk* (Hydrogen Dukebox)
For those not familiar with the Hydrogen Dukebox stable, they pioneer funky dance acts like A1 People, Omnivore and The Experiment. If those names don't ring any bells, and if your mind is of a funky bent, then get your hands on this now. (MS)

THE CURE
BLOODFLOWERS
(POLYDOR)

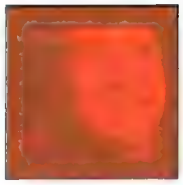
Funny isn't it? Some bands manage to carve a niche for years on end, record, tour like mad, and retain some form of credibility. The Cure should be a prime example of this. But, as time goes on, the lipstick-smacked Mr Smith and his varying roster of cohorts prove that it is very plausible to take the avenue of lacklustre rock. Maudlin they have been, and to great effect, but at least they had stand-out moments like 'Friday I'm In Love'. Not so here. Which is a shame, because The Cure deserve to have a place in the heart of any self-respecting 20-something. • *Michael Stand*

Producer: Robert Smith/Paul Corkett
Engineer: Paul Corkett/Sasha Jankovic
Studio: St. Catherine's Court/Rak
Verdict: They want to be loved 5/10

DJ FOOD
KALEIDOSCOPE
(NINJA TUNE)

Although not officially the latest in the illustrious line of *Jazz Brakes* volumes, this kaleidoscopic collection comes at you like a book of jazz recipes. Fusion cooking at its best? Most definitely. Slinky breaks of viagran proportions intersperse with abstract poly-rhythms, cosy dinner jazz greetings are juxtaposed with eerie, analogue anti-music. A recipe for disaster and then some, PC (in name only), and Strictly Kev explore the very depths, from jazzid to hard bop, telly jazz to techno, producing something distinctly serious… in an irreverent kinda way. • *Jon Andre Holley*

Producer: PC/Strictly Kev
Engineer: Ali Tod
Studio: The Infirmary/Via Jo
Verdict: 'Eclectic' is their middle name.....8/10



FIONA APPLE
WHEN THE PAWN...
(COLUMBIA)

This, the second album from Fiona Apple and the follow-up to 1996's *Tidal*, has already received much media attention. Here Fiona presents an unusual blend of songs – sometimes reminiscent of Tori Amos – with angst and heavy piano. Her voice *is* incredible, one minute soft and bluesy, the next hard and soulful and by virtue of the unusual beats and lush orchestration that accompany it, it's a strong album. All this is captured well by producer Jon Brion; however, none of Fiona's songs have any real freshness and somehow you feel that you've heard it all before. • *Claire Watkins*

Producer: Jon Brion
Engineer: Various
Studio: Various
Verdict: A Tori for Y2K.....7/10

SMASHING PUMPKINS
MACHINA/THE MACHINES OF GOD
(HUT RECORDINGS)

Two years ago Billy Corgan announced that rock was dead, turned to electronica, and gave the world *Adore*. Many reacted with some scepticism; but on the evidence of the rockist *Machina...* maybe he was right. There's nothing really wrong here, if you overlook the pompous titles and aren't bothered by Corgan's nasal whine, but, there's nothing particularly right, either. This collection of ballads, predictable rock-outs and stadium anthems would have been unremarkable if it had come out 10 years ago. If it hadn't come out at all, the world would be much the same. • *Simon Ounsworth*

Producers: Flood, Billy Corgan
Engineer: Unknown
Studio: Unknown
Verdict: Passable Pumpkins 5/10

KID KOALA
CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME
(NINJA TUNE)

With an album as leftfield as *Carpal Tunnel Syndrome* it's tempting to echo the sleeve and ask 'what the blooming blimey bollocks is this?'. Canadian DJ KK (real name Eric Yick-Keung San) has spent the last four years building up to this explosion of sampling, laid-back beats and a humungous amount of scratching (the first five minutes positively bubbles with it). And the young loon's done a pretty good job with this humourous, lurching trip of a disc that goes from TV vocals to sequenced beats to synth scratches and back again in the space of a few bars. • *Phil Strongman*

Producer: Kid Koala
Engineer: Carl Bastien
Studio: Various
Verdict: All aboard for fun-time.....8/10

THOMAS FEHLMANN
ONE TO THREE. OVERFLOW; NINENINE
(APOLLO/R&S)

Skip through leftfielder Thomas Fehlmann's latest offering looking for dancefloor monsters, and you'll be making a disgruntled trip back to the shop in no time. Despite its playfully bizarre opener 'I Wanna Be A Fishy', *One To Three*... is, at heart, the ambient, introspective work you'd expect from a long-time Orb/Fripp collaborator, and while Fehlmann definitely has got the funk, he's more interested in smuggling it past your ears than in waving it in your face. The result is an hour of loops and cut-ups that seem aimless, yet make more sense with each hearing. • *Simon Ounsworth*

Producer: Thomas Fehlmann
Engineer: Thomas Fehlmann
Studio: LAB, Berlin
Verdict: A deceptively fine record.....8/10

BOWERY ELECTRIC
LUSHLIFE
(BEGGARS BANQUET)

Sounds like it could be from St. Paul's region of Bristol but it's actually from Brooklyn, and the minds of Lawrence Chandler and Martha Schwendener. They recorded this album with only an Apple Mac, Pro Tools, a mic and sampler for company, save for Nick Drake's ample guitar work and a bed. Self-indulgence does occasionally encroach on this album (it was self-engineered), as do the limitations of austere strings and the vocal limitations of a whispy chanteuse. No-one does it like Portishead, but fans will love this, and 'Freedom Fighter' is exceptional. • *Jon Andre Holley*

Producer: Bowery Electric
Engineer: Lawrence Chandler
Studio: Bowery Electric Studios
Verdict: Bedroom soul for the sample age.....6/10

NEW AGE RADIO
SOUND IDEAS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
(MANDALA RECORDS)

This album represents a number of firsts. Being the debut CD of the third millennium it was out on New Year's Day, as well as being a limited edition that carries a Rainbow Land share offer. It's the first set by producer Goodman, of Afrika Bambaata fame, that happens to be entirely copyright-free. It's also very, very good with surreal vocals adding to rich melodic mixes of bleeping and soaring analogue synths, Mongolian cellos and other audio exotica. Dub, ambient and third-world rhythms add the finishing touches to a dazzling piece of tribadelica. • *Phil Strongman*

Producer: Dave Goodman
Engineer: Matt Zeg
Studio: Mandala
Verdict: Goodman's gettin' gooder.....9/10

in brief

BLAME *Two Revolutions* (720°) The nice, easy beats we've come to expect from the Good Looking collective are blended with computer-aided precision to produce this pleasant, uplifting and well-produced collection of d'n'b tracks – the perfect soundtrack for any Sunday drive. (OO)

MIRA CALIX *OneonOne* (Warp) Self-conciously trendy, Mira's musical style is more conservative than she'd like to think. *OneonOne* flows nicely and there are some excellent samples and rhythms, but all it adds up to is nice background music. (GS)

SHANKS DK *Quick Recovery* (R&S) This is surprisingly good fun. Describing themselves as 'breakbeat', but more accessible than a lot of breakbeat that comes from the UK, Danish trio Shanks DK fall between Basement Jaxx and Orbital. (GS)

MILESTONES: 1996

DJ SHADOW
ENDTRODUCING
(MO' WAX)

In 1996 trip hop was starting to bore all but its most hardcore followers. Albums such as Portishead's *Dummy* had become fantastic radio-friendly while most trip hop wannabes were just imitating Tricky's dark, claustrophobic vibe. Enter DJ Shadow. Davy was a sample-obsessed geek from Northern California who had spent his musically formative years listening to underground hip hop pioneers such as Dimitri From Paris, Kill Switch and Muhammad Ali and his Native Rockers. By the time 1996 rolled around Davy was making his own mind-blowing instrumental hip hop records and was ready to release his debut album. Working in collaboration with Mo' Wax, Shadow's first album was released in March 1996 and was called *Endtroducing*. Recorded entirely on an Akai MPC60 sampler, it was a collage of obscure soul, funk and jazz samples, mixed with dialogue from old movies and TV shows. Shadow's sample collection was so huge that he had to keep a log of what he had sampled and where it was from, in case he ever wanted to use it again. Shadow's sample generation – hip hop producers who had grown up with the digital sampler – swiftly won over thousands of clubbers and hip hop fans, while the critics fell in love with a bona-fide hip hop genius. Shadow's debut album was a landmark in hip hop history and remains a favourite in chill-out rooms and trip hop clubs to this day. Shadow's second album, *The Private Press*, was released in 2002 and showed how far he had progressed in the intervening six years. Rather than relying on battered vinyl to source his samples, Shadow had begun to record his own material and play it live in the studio. The result was a more organic sound, but one that still retained the trademark Shadow sound.

Producer: DJ Shadow
Studio: The Glue Factory, San Francisco
Engineer: The Automator

EMITAPE

How to get ahead in advertising

words **Douglas McPherson** photography **James Cumpsty**

You hear his music every night of the week, but you've probably never heard his name. Meet Tot Taylor, the man behind a thousand mini masterpieces

For a man who writes the music for adverts, it was like watching your numbers rolling from the machine on the National Lottery…

Tot Taylor had just finished watching *The Grimleys* to see how the music he had composed sounded coming out of his TV ("It always sounds different to what it does in the studio"). Then on came an advert to which he had written the score, and then another one.

"As the third one came on my engineer phoned me and said, 'You've had three ads in a row,' and as we were talking the fourth one came on. Then two more!" Taylor had written the music for every ad in the break plus the music for the two programmes that bookended it.

It's a measure of how much Tot's music has crept into our lives in the last few years. You may not have heard his name, but you've undoubtedly heard his work on adverts from Powergen and the Army to programmes starring Mark Lamarr, Jack Dee and Lee Evans.

Tot has also worked extensively on movie soundtracks and made his own records, which are genuinely big in Japan. Indeed, so prolific is this 'unknown' musician that he has just released some 80 albums of the music he has been involved in on his own labels: Poppy Records and Tweed Couture.

"My work is what I live," says Tot, who operates out of a converted apartment in London's fashionable Camden Town, in a studio that is surprisingly unencumbered by kit. "I may be in a studio at ten, doing an orchestral session. If I finish at four I'll probably have a mix or an edit to go to. Then I'll come here to check messages. If I do go home I'll listen to records, play piano or write something."

Tot's one interest outside of music is art, as is reflected by the gallery above his studio space. "I'm not trying to be a full-time art dealer. It's just stuff I've been buying for 25 years because I liked it. Whenever somebody gave me an advance I used it to buy paintings and prints. They do appreciate, so we have three or four sales a year."

Although he paints himself, the one thing Tot's gallery doesn't sell is his own work. "My own stuff's rubbish!" he splutters. "I wouldn't want to inflict that on anyone!" Nor does Tot spend the takings from his gallery on buying equipment. "I don't spend much money on that kind of thing," he explains. "That doesn't make me make better music. My brain makes me make better music".

A Pro Tools system certainly isn't on Tot's shopping list. Mere mention of the name brings the bile to his throat. "Pro Tools and all those kinds of sequencers, which is basically what they are, are for people who can't play anything. If you can play, you don't need 'em.

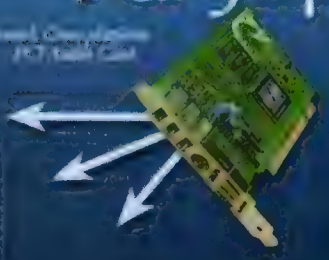
"With Pro Tools you can move a snare drum or tidy up the hi-hat. So what? One of the interesting things about making music is getting it right; just getting the drummer to play the thing right, so why do I need a machine to make it that bit more perfect than it was?

"If you talk to great producers and engineers, people who have huge Pro Tools set-ups, and you ask them what records they like, they'll all name records made without using Pro Tools."

Tot's largest expenditure is probably the tons of CDs he buys each year. "I buy at least 60 to 70 albums a week," he confesses. "If I go into Virgin Megastore or HMV on Oxford Street, it's bad for me because first I'll go to the Classical section and buy maybe 20 albums there, then I'll go to Folk, Soul, Dance and Pop. I could be in a record shop for four hours. I actually went in the Virgin Megastore in Paris and bought something like 160 albums between half seven and midnight when they were closed."

Justifying his passion, Tot explains, "Listening to lots of records helps you evolve your style, because one of the things you try to do in music is not to do the same thing twice. I don't listen to rubbish music. That rots your brain. Likewise, I don't listen to rubbish radio stations – which tends to be all of them – even though they use some of my music for idents!"

PCI-324



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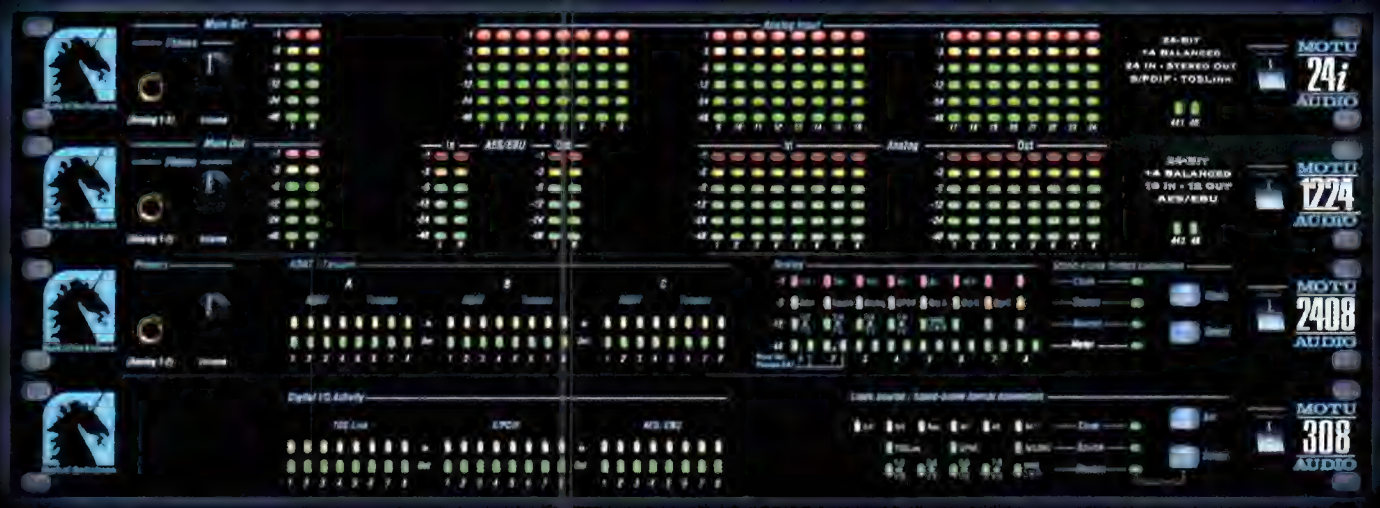

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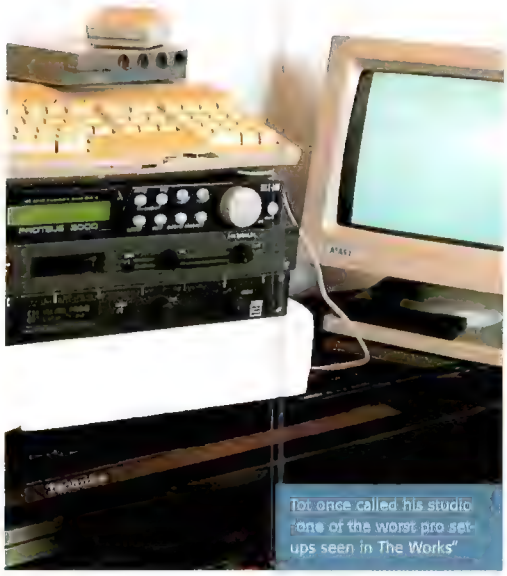
Tot's studio is geared towards the creative, rather than the technical aspects of music production



Tot once called his studio one of the worst pro set-ups seen in The Works"

kit list

Recording
Otari MX80
Atari 1040
Hybrid Arts SMPTE sequencer

Monitors
Acoustic Energy AE2

Sounds
Technics SX-PX228 piano
JP-800 keyboard
Korg M3R+03R modules
Korg X3, X5 and X5DR
Proteus Mark 1
Proteus 2000
OBX Matrix 1000
Emax sampler
Roland 305 Groovebox

Tot spent his childhood in Littleport on the outskirts of Norfolk, "in what my headmaster called a 'cultural wasteland', which is probably why I went bonkers for culture later on. The only book we had in the house was a telephone book. Literally".

The Taylor family however, were naturally musical, although none of the members were formally trained. Tot was introduced to making music in a very hands-on way. "It was very much, 'Look, here's a xylophone. You can play a tune on it'. I remember winning a toy trumpet when I was five or six. My grandmother immediately grabbed hold of it, never having seen a trumpet before, and played a tune on it.

"My dad played accordion in pubs and my mother always talked about classical music. We never had any records in the house, but if we were watching a film on television she would say, 'That's Chopin's so and so in the background'."

Never a shining academic at school ("I was 31 out of 31 in my class"), Tot discovered the love of his life at 14 when his Dad brought home a piano. "Ironically, a lot of my inspiration was from listening to adverts. Instead of going to school, I would put the telly on and play along with every piece of music that came on."

Initially trying out his early compositions in a folk club in Ely ("I supported people like Martin Carthy, who is very under-sung"), Tot found himself in a band and signed to a major label through a bizarre chain of events. "I was getting ready to go to Cambridge Art School when a bloke called at my parents' house and said, 'Are you Tot Taylor?' I said 'Yeah'. He said, 'Do you play any instruments?'. I said 'Yeah'. And he said, 'Would you like to join our band?'.

"I said 'What do you mean? I don't even know who you are'. He said, 'Our drummer said he saw you hitch-hiking to Cambridge and you had a brilliant shirt on.' So I got in a band because I had a brilliant shirt on, which is a pretty good reason to get in a band!"

> "A lot of my inspiration was from listening to adverts. Instead of going to school, I'd put the telly on and play along with everything that came on"

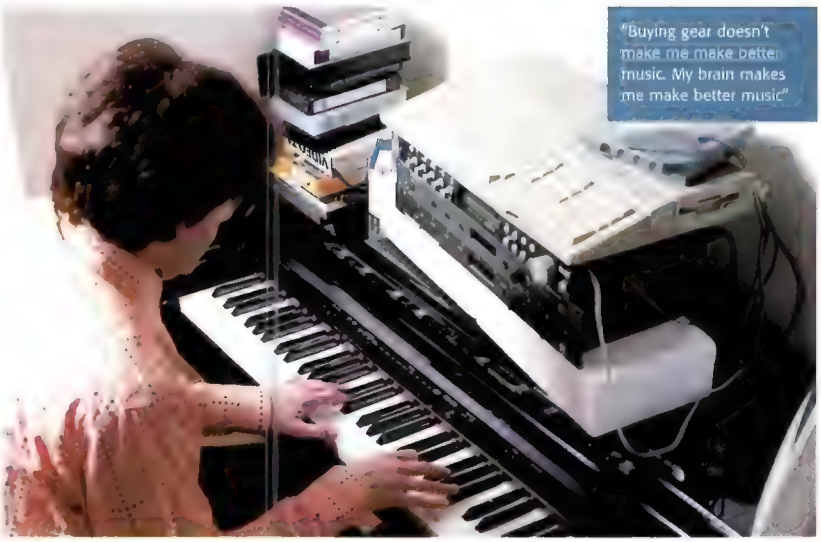
After six months the band decided to get a deal. Most of their favourite records were on Island, so... "We made a three-song demo in Northampton and, in our naivete, turned up at Island. The receptionist said, 'Have you got an appointment?' We were so thick we thought she meant an appointment with the doctor! We were standing there going, 'Appointment? No, we've just got a tape.'

"At that moment a young chap happened to come down the stairs and said, 'Come up, I'll have a listen to it.' When I got home my mum said, 'You've had a phone call from Island.' She thought it was the country. That's how I got my first deal!".

Tot's taste of pop star life was nice while it lasted. "There was Sparks recording in the studio to the left and Roxy Music to the right, which we thought was well groovy. They waltzed us up and down the King's

CD info

tracks 03-07
Music from the BBC documentary *Early Travellers in North America*, composed by Tot Taylor



"Buying gear doesn't make me make better music. My brain makes me make better music"

It's not what you've got...

Tot's favourite piece of gear is an almost stone-age Hybrid Arts SMPTE sequencer that dates from the early '80s. "It was the only sequencer at the time with SMPTE code on it, so I was quite ahead of the game at that point," says Tot with an ironic chuckle.

"The other reason I got it was it's always in record. When you turn on the machine it's running" That's important to Tot, who likes to work quickly, whether composing at the piano, on guitar, or laying down a rhythm track on his drum kit.

Although he records in major studios when the budget allows, Tot says: "I've done quite big things on 4-track portastudios. Basically, my thing is, if you've got a little bit of a tune or a chord sequence that lifts somebody, you can record that on any mic onto a cassette and it sounds alright. Sound and sonics are the refuge of the unmusical."

Before we leave this technophobe, though, what's that Roland 305 Groovebox doing in the corner? Never been used, apparently. "It's a load of bollocks," says Tot, with all the tact he can muster. "I phoned up Roland and even *they* admitted it's not a very good machine."

» Road to buy clothes and I remember them taking us for a haircut to Leonards in Mayfair. We were used to half-crown haircuts and this cost, like, 18 quid. It was phenomenal!"

Phenomenal, that is, until label head Chris Blackwell heard the finished record, declared it "The worst record I've ever heard," and dropped the band. Tot was subsequently picked up (and dropped as quickly) by CBS and EMI, where he recorded the prophetically-titled album *Jingles*. UK stardom was clearly not going to happen. However, with each aborted deal, Tot picked up a massive advance, which he used to release his CBS album on his own Easy Listeners label. It went on to sell a million copies in Japan. He also reworked one of his Island tracks to create Mari Wilson's Top 10 hit 'Just What I Always Wanted'.

No Pro Tools here – the trusty Otari MX80 recorder is as high-tech as it gets

Tot signed Sweden's Virna Lindt to his label and enjoyed a further million-seller in Japan, as well as a No.1 hit in Sweden. When one of the songs from Virna's album was used in a TV commercial for Chanel, Taylor was invited to Japan to work for the ad agency Dentsu.

In a varied career since, he has also worked as a song-fixer in America, helping songwriters polish up songs intended for stars from Michael Jackson to Barbara Streisand. "I'd show up at the houses of all these professional songwriters, who all had about three swimming pools. At first they were very dubious, mainly because I was English and England doesn't have a tradition of understanding song structures and formulas," recalls Tot, adding with a smile: "But I know the formulas better than they do!"

> "If someone's doing an ad for the latest toy that swears at you if you pull its head off, sorry, but I don't do that kind of job"

In fact, Tot puts a great emphasis on the need to understand how good music is put together. "I'm not talking about crappy American formulas that you get on Cher records. I'm talking about the formulas The Beatles used, Leiber and Stoller and Carole King, chord sequences that work because they have a psychological effect on you. Timings, song structures and beats that work.

"Unfortunately, the only people in England that seem to understand the formulas today are people who make shite records! People like Stock, Aitken and Waterman, or the people who write for boy bands. The formulas can be used for bad songs and wonderful songs."

Having worked on BT's Busby campaign in the early '80s ("Remember that awful bird?") Taylor has, in the last five years, intensified his work in the advertising world because, he says, of changing attitudes towards the making of adverts.

"They want to make art," he explains. "That may sound ludicrous, but the people who make films for something like Powergen are not particularly trying to make something that sells the product. The advertising agency and the client are trying to do that. But the director is trying to make something of beauty. So when they call me, that's what they want: a staggering, dynamic, beautiful piece of music.

"If they want a do-di-do-di-do jingle they won't phone me, because there's a lot of people that can do that a lot better. In fact, I turn down a lot of work. If someone's doing an ad for the latest toy that swears at you if you pull its head off, sorry, but I don't do that kind of job."

Tot's position at the top of his profession was cemented in 1999, when he beat off competition from Massive Attack, Portishead and Unkle to win the internationally renowned D&AD award for Best Sound Design – by recording the sound of a vacuum cleaner being flung around his living room.

Beatles fan Tot owns the original 'All You Need is Love' placards from their 1967 live broadcast

Tot is happy to shout about the sonic brilliance of his Acoustic Energy AE2 monitors

However, he has some 'advice' for anyone tempted to follow in his footsteps.

"Being totally serious, my biggest tip is don't. A professional musical life is not a particularly pleasant experience, and it's not as financially rewarding as people think. It's not for people who want to get married and have kids, because you can't have a social life. The only way you can do this is to not do anything else. But an amateur musical life, one that's not based on making money from music, is phenomenally wonderful. "So I always say, if you think you're gifted, write music for yourself. Don't write music for TV programmes or whatever. Only do that if you're another sort of character, which is what I am.

"I want to write music and have people listen to it," he explains. "And doing the variety of things that I do, I can get through to more people. I can have a piece of music in the Cup Final or whatever, and know that 50 million people are listening. That's a bit of a kick."

For those still determined to join Tot at what he calls "the coal face of pop," the maestro has some practical advice. "The first tip is move to London, because this is where the business is. Why should I give someone in Leeds a job when there are six people in my street doing music for TV? Which is true. In this building there's probably ten.

"The other tip is you've got to be able to do everything. You've got to be able to play several instruments, and you've got to have an incredibly wide knowledge of music." That explains why Tot buys all those CDs every week, then…

"You might get called in for a job and they'll say, 'We want something a bit like *West Side Story*. We like the dynamics of *The Rite Of Spring*, but have you heard the Gay Dad album?' If you go, 'Who are they,' you're out."

> "You've got to be able to play several instruments, and you've got to have an incredibly wide knowledge of music"

Warming to his theme, Tot continues, "You've got to know how *The Rite Of Spring* goes and hum it to them. You've got to go, *West Side Story* – which song?'. And if they say 'One Hand, One Heart,' the least well-known song, you've got to go, 'Oh yeah – da-da-der-da-da.' And if they say they like the second track on the new Chemical Brothers album, you've got to go, 'Yeah, that starts with two funk loops, doesn't it? Then it's got a kinda psychedelic wail…'".

Summing up with a smile, the ad theme king has a warning for contenders to his throne: "If you don't know everything, get out of the business, because I do know everything and I'll be on your tail!"

Tot's latest album, Popfolkjazz, is available from your local record shop or (along with his 80 other releases) from www.poppyrecords.com

Wolf Studios

words **Oz Owen** images **James Cumpsty**

Can it be legal for one man to own so much studio gear? *The Mix* goes to Brixton to investigate...

"The fact that I work in a studio is an accident," begins Dominique Brethes, producer, engineer and founder of Wolf Studios in South London's Brixton. "When I arrived in London in '77 I worked as a musician playing in bands, and I began gathering bits of equipment. Then I started wanting more gear" - anyone know that feeling? "So I started renting the studio to friends or getting people in to do sessions. Basically, it got completely out of hand and I found myself running a studio and finding that I was better as an engineer, working on the other side of the mixing desk, helping people to get good recordings.

"Recently I've been doing more and more mastering, which again started completely as an accident, mainly due to the frustration of getting CDs back that sound completely different from the mixes I was doing here. So a few years ago I started looking into the mastering side, given that it's usually just an extension of the mix.

17 years ago, Dominique was a struggling film director holding down a day job to pay the bills. While "banging his head against the wall" in the cut-throat world of the film industry, he was also building up his arsenal of recording studio kit. When the day job fell through, he was forced to choose the studio as a "proper business".

"My girlfriend of the time was living in Brixton, and that's how I came to live here. Brixton has changed quite a lot recently – it's become very trendy. Lots of musicians and painters, its a creative area, so often a lot of my clients come from around Brixton, which is quite handy."

With so much gear crammed into the Victorian three-storey house, it's a wonder the studio can wrest enough energy from the National Grid to operate smoothly, but with Dominique's years of experience in the amply-stocked confines of Wolf, his opinions on equipment carry a certain weight.

"I've been using Pro Tools since the beginning, when it was Sound Tools. Since working with all the plug-ins it's very hard to go back to another way of working, especially as it's so visual – akin to being a painter where you can move all the audio around. Over the past three years I've been doing more and more work on Pro Tools, and everyone is talking about it. I think it's going to be the next big format, as opposed to RADAR, which is more of a tape replacement.

"I find the way technology is going at the minute is very interesting, what with all the plug-ins and virtual instruments, like the virtual Prophet Five and the new Microphone Modeler that's been released by Antares.

"Not only is this kind of technology convincing, in a lot of cases I think it's better," continues Dominique, potentially opening a sizeable can of worms. "The [Line 6] Pod and Amp Farm are incredible. It's an argument I've been having with bands like Stereolab, but to me it's just a frame of mind. I much prefer using something like Amp Farm because what you hear is what is actually being recorded. When you hear it through the NS10s you know nothing will change, but a guitarist playing through an amp has a different perception of how he or she sounds. For example, the vibration from the floor will give a different kind of sound from what's being recorded.

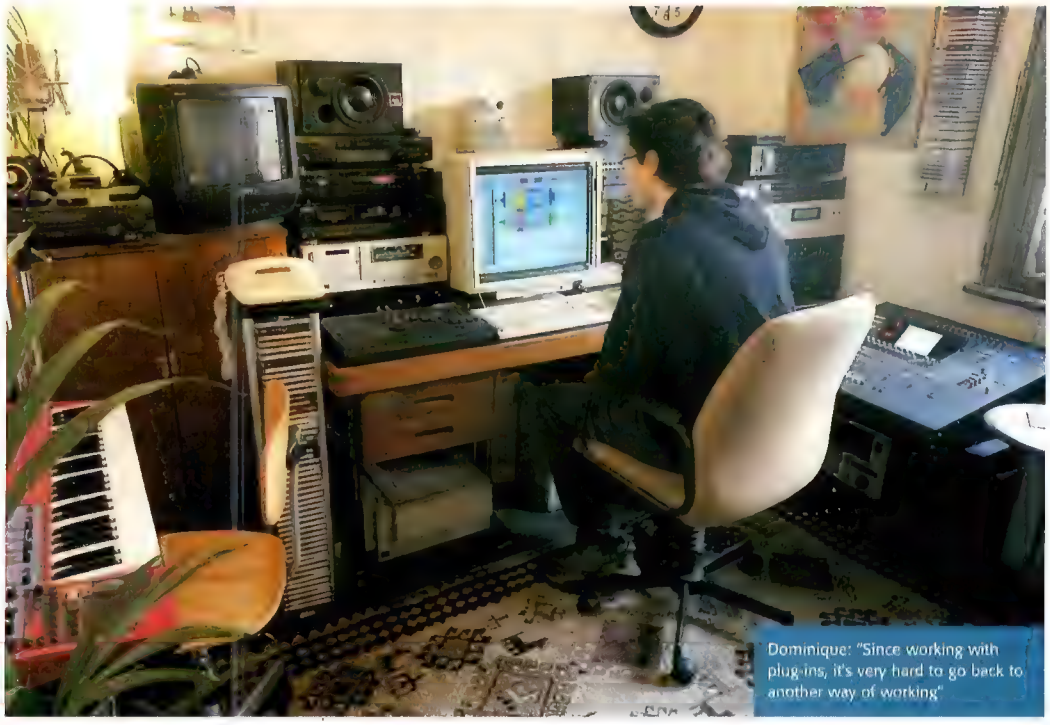
Dominique mid-session with d'n'b diva Apache 61

"The other bonus of course is that after spending hours recording a guitar you tend to forget that it might be completely the wrong sound when it comes to mixing. With something like Amp Farm, because the effect is applied on top of the sound, at the last minute you can turn a Fender into a Marshall, so you have that flexibility, and that's what I love about all the plug-ins in Pro Tools – the fact that they're non-destructive – if it doesn't work, you can try a different sound.

Dominique is convinced that studios will be wholly computer-based within the next few years. "One of the biggest advantages with the computer is the total recall situation, so you can work on a session, close one mix, and start work on another. We can always come back to a song at any point, and load it up »

selected kit list: main studio

- Console
- Amek Angela with Mastermix
- Monitoring
- JBL LX55
- Acoustic Research 18
- Yamaha NS10M
- Recording
- Studer A80 MkII 24 track 2" analogue
- ADAT XT20
- Pro Tools Mix 24
- Ampex ATR102 1/2" stereo recorder
- Effects/outboard
- AMS RMX16 digital reverb
- AMS 15-80 digital delay
- Digitech Vocalist VHM5
- Eventide DSP4000B
- Eventide H3000 B/SE
- Lexicon PCM80
- Roland SBF325 analogue chorus/flanger
- TC Electronic Fireworx
- Ursa Major Stargate 323 digital reverb
- Focusrite Red 2 stereo equaliser
- Avalon VT737 tube preamp/comp/EQ
- DBX 566 tube 2-channel comp/lim
- DBX 162 vintage stereo compressor
- Focusrite Red 3 stereo comp/lim
- JoeMeekVC1 Studio Channel comp
- Tubetech CL1A tube compressor
- Urei LA-22 dual comp/lim



Dominique: "Since working with plug-ins, it's very hard to go back to another way of working"

straight away, and all of the effects and reverb settings are exactly the same. This is totally impossible with the mixing desk, as you still have to take account of all the effects and it can be impossible – one way or another – to exactly recreate a mix as you left it.

"Total recall is particularly useful when doing film music or jingles where the clients are always changing their minds," stresses Dominique, "and you really need to be able to load up exactly the same mix. The old fashioned way was to load up the entire mix and change what they want, but because it's manual - not with total recall - they complain that something else is different, not the same as it used to be. That was always a problem, even with the SSL."

Dominique is an advocate of using valve gear to warm up the perceived 'clinical' nature of the digital sound. "It's important to make the sound warmer at the recording stage, as it never comes back off tape the way it used to with 2". One of my favourites is the Neumann 149 microphone, which seems to work with nine out of 10 singers, usually going through the Tubetech for recording.

"The Focusrite I love as the main mastering compressor. Most people think that Focusrite use valves because they sound so warm, but it's just a very well-made transformer-based compressor. I also really like the JoeMeek VC1 as an effect because of the exciter section, which can be used as an EQ. I found that you can make the voice really stick out in the mix.

"With equipment I've learned that it's better to go for the best in each category. A machine like a Focusrite may be expensive when you buy it but it won't go out of fashion. Years and years later it's still the best around, and the resale value is still there, so going for the best can save you money in the long run. And, of course, it always sounds better. I always try to get the best machine available as that corresponds to my taste – basically, I like warm sounds, bassy sounds. I don't like brittle sounds, so I tend to stay away from the VCA-based compressor, which is great as an effect on drums, but all the opto-electrics, like the Avalons and the JoeMeeks sound so much better on vocals, as do the valve ones."

Although Dominique is firmly in the high-tech camp, not all the latest developments have been taken onboard. "I'm not really convinced about surround sound. It's hard enough dealing with stereo, and even nowadays when we do mixes in stereo for television they tend to be broadcast in mono. It's interesting, but I don't know many people who will decide to move their sofa into the middle of the room to be able to have surround sound.

For warming up that digital sound, take your pick from this arsenal of outboard...

Even in the studio of a digital fanatic, there's still the faithful old Studer 2"

"As it is, with stereo, a lot of people put one speaker on the carpet and another on a shelf. So we spend ages mixing and getting a really good sound, but after that people do whatever they want at home. It's the same with car stereos – you sit nearer to one speaker than the other, so I'm not totally convinced yet. It might be more for record companies to re-release all their back catalogue in 5.1 instead of signing new artists.

"In the same way, I'm not totally convinced about all those 96kHz, 24-bit gear that's all over the place at the minute. It's a pain from the practical point of view because it's expensive to change so many bits in your set-up to get the most out of it. I don't think anyone can really hear the difference, and speakers aren't good enough to make a difference. But I'm glad that this year the emphasis has shifted to MP3, which is the other extreme. Record companies should beware – especially here in the UK, where the price of a CD is around £16."

When it comes to sounds, Dominique is even less likely to grasp at the latest new toy on the market. "In terms of keyboards, there's nothing I have found very interesting since the Nord Lead, basically because I'm doing less programming and concentrating more on mixing and mastering. I have enough sounds now, and most of the time I tend to come back to the same ones. It's more important to know one machine rather than having lots of different machines, otherwise you end up wasting too much time going through all the presets. So I tend to rely on what I know, sounds I have been building up for years.

"Wolf Studios has always been very personalised, not so much a commercial facility. It's more that people are coming to work with me rather than just renting the place and bringing their own engineer. The downside of that is having to work all the time, six or seven days a week. I'm not young anymore, and last year I had a few problems with my back, so I really should take it easy now and stop living my life in a chair."

Although Dominique has considered expanding the facilities at Wolf, he has ultimately decided to stick with the 'personal approach'. "After seeing some studios, I realised it was impossible to finance a commercial studio just by renting. Basically the format of all those flagship studios in the '70s and '80s was having an SSL and not a lot else. SSL studios used to charge a premium, but now a lot of them are struggling – often because they're not earning any money, so they don't have the means to maintain the facility.

"I think the future is going to be in fast telephone lines, and studios are going to have to adapt very quickly. The problem is that a lot of the older-style studios don't have the money to adapt – they're still paying for the SSL they bought 10 years ago. They don't have the finances to be able to buy, for example, a new Pro Tools system, and may not have the knowledge to operate the new technology, which is moving so fast. As a result of that, they often find that they're not getting any work and have to close down. I've seen that a lot in the last few years, you know, a lot of those top studios from the '80s just don't seem to attract the kind of work you need to make a studio a profitable business.

"It's quite challenging. We've realised that we would like to keep quite small so we can carry on offering a very personalised service, which is a good way to control the quality of what we're doing here. And also keeping good relationships with the clients, because recording and mixing isn't all to do with the technical side – understanding what the client wants is very important. So as the owner, my job is to make sure everyone is comfortable in the studio and that they always get extra attention from me."

More from: Wolf Studios Tel: 0207 733 8088 Web: www.netkonect.co.uk/w/wolfen/WolfStudios.html/

former clients

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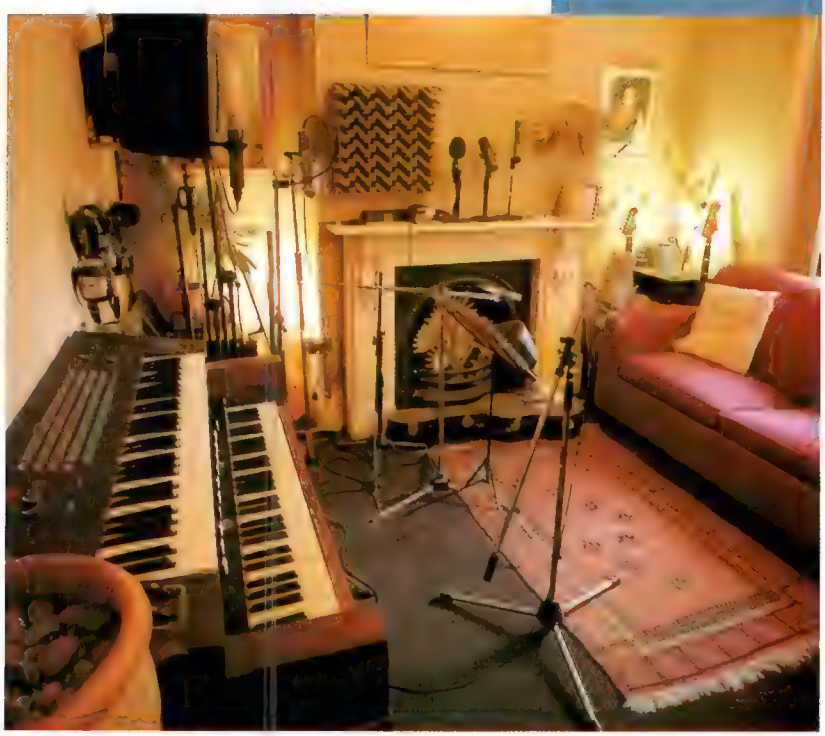
- Sasha
- Touch & Go
- Apache 61
- Steven Severin
- Republica
- Jimmy Cauty
- Andy Bell
- Mick Karn
- Arthur Baker
- BT
- Zion Train
- Spooky
- John Digweed
- The Pogues
- The Levellers

rates

- 24-track: £353/10-hour day
- 32/48-track: £447/10-hour day
- mastering: £42 p/h
- prices include engineer



Amongst his collection of 30+ mics, one of Dominique's favourites is the Neumann 149

Back for good

words **Derek O'Sullivan** photography **James Cheadle**

After almost 20 years in the business, influential Bristol production team Rob Smith, Ray Mighty and Peter D Rose discuss the techniques that elevated them to their now-legendary status...

Ray Mighty is pissed off. Pacing around the studio with a bible-thick book flipped open at page 2,000 or so, he's trying to extract some vital information pertaining to the effective deployment of his latest purchase. "I've just got this Roland VM3100 mixer. It looks great, but as usual it's a lot more complicated than the manual makes out. Can you believe I'm still trying to work out how to get a signal from the digital outputs on a digital desk?" Hmmm, well as someone who once spent some eight hours trying to fathom an equally rudimentary function on a Yamaha 03D, the simple answer is: 'Yes, I can...'

In spite of their huge involvement in, and influence on, the 'Bristol Sound', circumstances largely beyond their control have seen pioneering sound forgers Rob Smith, Ray Mighty and Peter D Rose take something of a back seat to higher-profile West Country success stories like Tricky, Portishead, Roni Size and the ubiquitous Massive Attack.

But check their pedigree: as early fixtures on the mid '80s St Paul's sound system scene, Smith & Mighty co-produced the first Wild Bunch release, 'Look Of Love', when the 'Bunch consisted of future big players like Nellee Hooper, Miles Johnson, Grant (Daddy G) and Mushroom. In fact, Smith & Mighty's early releases – in particular their interpretations of the Burt Bacharach songs 'Anyone (Who Had A Heart)' and 'Walk On By' – are regarded by aficionados as a blueprint for the mellow basslines, soulful vocals and intricate, orchestrated arrangements that became synonymous with the flavour of the region. It's little surprise then, to discover that Massive Attack's debut single, 'Any Love' also happens to have been produced by, yep, Smith & Mighty.

Subsequent work at the controls on 'Wishing On A Star', a one hit wonder for Fresh Four (featuring a 17-year old DJ Krust no less), saw Smith & Mighty faced with a flurry of record company interest. After infamously turning down Virgin Records with the comment: "We just don't like [Richard Branson's] style, and the way Margaret Thatcher has portrayed him as the ideal business mogul. Maybe it's got something to do with the fact that we used to be punks", a deal was finally struck with London Records.

Sadly, however, the coupling was something of a disaster, as Ray recounts: "We were signed for five years, but being a major label, London had loads of other artists to deal with, so we found that our stuff kept getting put back. We only released one record – 'Steppers Delight' – with them in all that time. They kept asking us to remix our album, they wanted us to adapt our music as fashions changed, and ultimately they just weren't enthusiastic about anything we did."

After their contractual release from London Records, Smith & Mighty joined forces with fellow Bristolian Peter D Rose to establish their own imprint More Rockers (see box on p. 78). As an accomplished writer and producer himself, with previous accolades that encompass work on Massive Attack's seminal *Blue Lines* album, Rose's involvement with Smith & Mighty as a writing entity was soon realised. Normal service was quickly resumed, with the three protagonists working on a variety of projects from their separate studios, most recently combining ideas from past and present on their new album *Big World, Small World* for choice German label Studio K7.

Surprisingly, the three studios from which the collective operate are far from identically compatible. Like evolutionary stages, Smith, Mighty and Rose are equipped with varying degrees of retro-present-modern technology; a factor reflected in the cross-pollination of sounds and styles that make up their latest release. Peter D Rose elaborates: "There's nothing worse than working together and having to fight to get your hands on the computer or faders or whatever, so separate studios make sense for us. Even though we work individually, we all know what vibe we're on, and by working that way, in completely different studios, we bring a variety of elements to the music. Rob, »

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for example, has really got the digital domain bug. He's running a PC-based set-up at the moment, with pretty much everything worked between that and a JV-2080. He's really getting the Acid program, and VST with all the plug-ins."

Peter's studio is less computercentric at present, although he is planning to move in that direction in the very near future, as he explains: "I'm still very much into separate components. I use the S3000 a lot, and live parts or vocals are recorded on ADAT, but at the moment I'm waiting to move to a G4-based set-up so that I can really get into recording and editing live stuff on the computer. I've been holding out for quite a while now. I was tempted by the G3, but the whole USB thing put me off – there wasn't really enough compatibility at the time – but the wait seems to have paid off, because there are loads more USB devices out there now.

Smith & Mighty (L-R: Rob, Pete and Ray) work in separate studios, all with varying degrees of digital. The Bristol boys are pictured here in Pete's studio

"One of the best things about having a powerful computer at the core of your set-up is being able to call back different mixes and jump back and forward between projects easily. It'll probably cost about three grand to get the set-up I want, including a decent-sized monitor, the interface and an A-D breakout box; but if I can work on an Atari for ten years, I'm sure the G4 will keep me interested for a while."

There's still a place for simple technology in Peter's studio though, particularly in the early stages of the writing process. "I personally like to work with the vocalists on initial ideas," he explains: "Programming a basic beat on the SR-16 or RX7, adding a simple bassline, and getting them to sing a rough. From there, I'll strip right back to the vocal and build up the track. I've also really been getting into cleaning up the mixes recently, bringing in things like the SPL Vitalizer, and using compressors a lot more as well – I've never really compressed stuff in the past, but you just end up having to ride so much on the mix if you don't."

Alongside the hip hop and soul characteristics of their music, the Smith & Mighty sound has always nodded heavily towards reggae and dub influences, a fact borne out by certain production focal points. "I love my Vesta delay, and the Rex 50," Peter continues: "I like that hands-on thing where you can flick on a delay and feed it back on the fly. It also goes back to trying to capture that sound system kind of sub-bass frequency in the studio. A lot of that comes from layering and EQ-ing a range of sources on the sampler." So no live bass in your recordings then? "No, we don't really use live bass at all." Ray interjects "I've tried it, but it's like, the cheaper the bass player, the more compression you've got to use, so the more of a friend the bass player is, the harder the job, and it's difficult to get the actual sounds we want from a live bass anyway. The bottom end usually comes out of a keyboard. I usually use a Juno 106 for that, then pretty much any other Roland sound over the top to define the notes."

On the whole, Smith & Mighty's rhythm parts are programmed from scratch rather than sourced

selected kit list

Console

Spirit Studio 24:8:2

Roland VM3100

Recording

Alesis ADAT

Tascam DA20

Atari running Cubase

Monitors

Realistic Mach One

Yamaha NS10

Sound processors

Roland R-77

Akai S3000XL

Yamaha DMC-411 digital delay

TL Audio C1621 valve compressor

Omni-Craft G1-4A compressor

Lexicon LXP-5

Alesis Nanoverb2

Zoom Studio 1204

Yamaha REV 50

Roland SH101

Casio FZ-1

Roland D-50

Yamaha DX21

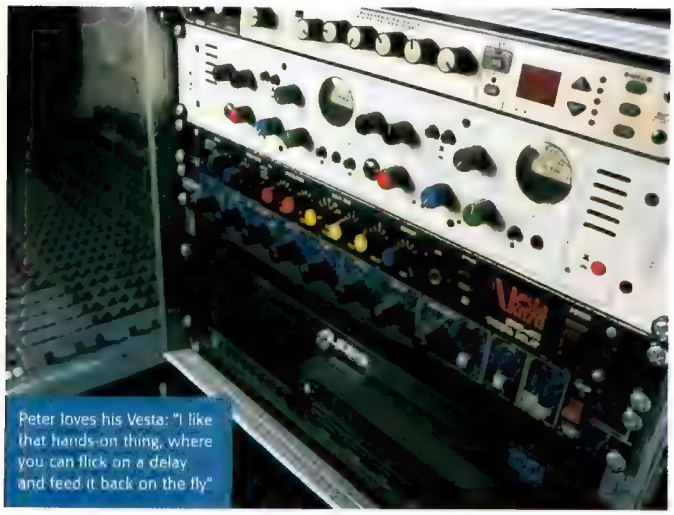
Yamaha MA16 Sound Expander

Korg DSR/W Module

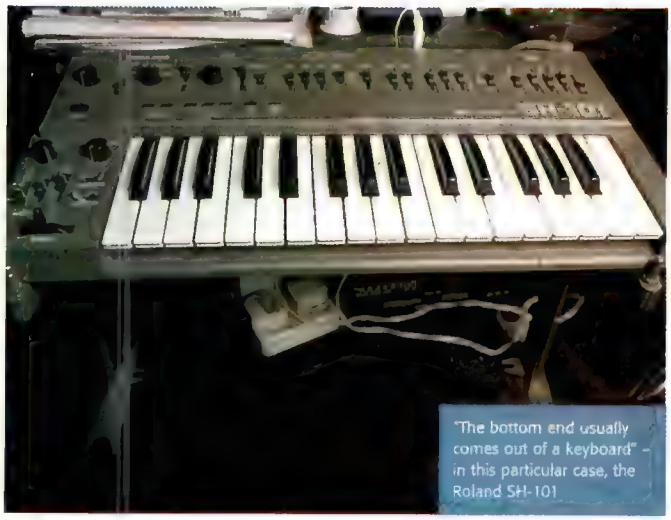
Alesis SR16

Yamaha RX7

Novation Drumstation



Peter loves his Vesta: "I like that hands-on thing, where you can flick on a delay and feed it back on the fly"



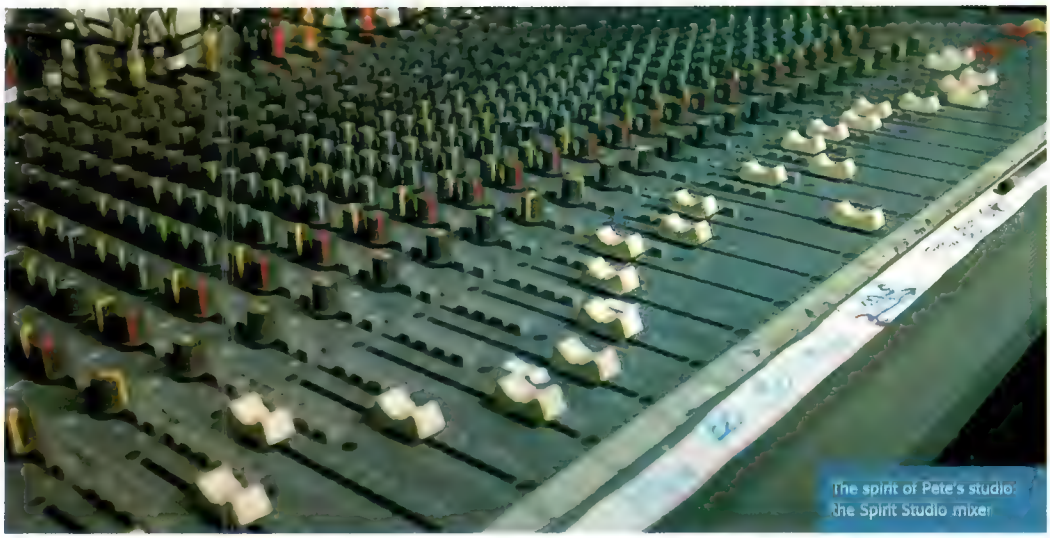
"The bottom end usually comes out of a keyboard" – in this particular case, the Roland SH-101

More Rockers

"It's not until you're out of it that you realise exactly how crap it was." Ray reflects on Smith & Mighty's time with London Records philosophically: "You try to retain as much control as you can when you sign these deals, and you can have it written in your contract and everything, but ultimately it's up to the label whether they actually put your music out, and if they don't want to do it, they've got you by the balls."

It was partly the experience of being lost within the swollen roster of a major label that inspired Smith & Mighty to go it alone and set up their own label More Rockers, back in 1995. But co-founder Peter explains their other motivations: "Towards the end of that deal we'd been going to raves a lot and seeing that whole thing really happen, with the introduction of breakbeats in house music and the whole jungle thing. It was a style that me and Rob were into, and the idea with More Rockers was to create an outlet outside the London scene, through which we could release jungle and drum'n'bass.

"We put out a record called *Selection 1* which, as far as we know, was the first jungle album by an artist. Before that there were probably a couple of compilations, but no other artist albums. We're actually looking to re-release it now because we've had so many people asking where they can get hold of it, particularly in America where they're really getting into the music now. *Selection 2* followed that, and again, it was really well received, so we're working on the third album at the moment."



The spirit of Pete's studio: the Spirit Studio mixer

from loops, but Peter and Ray come from different ends of the spectrum where beats are concerned. "I often start a track by programming breaks. When I first got the Akai, I built up a massive sound library of kicks and snares, and I'm still using sounds from that now, as well as the drum machines, which are good sources for clean drum sounds that I can mess about with in the sampler." Ray however, takes a different approach: "The break and the hi-hats are probably the last things I put in. I tend to write a full track that stands up as it is, then really fight to find the right break to work with it. If I can't find anything, I've got a couple of kits sampled and I'll program something up from them. I think beats and hats mess with your ears too much, so I always leave them until last, particularly hats – I can guess what they're going to do anyway. Most people tend to work from the beats up, which is alright, but you often end up basing everything around a rhythm, which often means that you play down the other elements."

> "Separate studios make sense to us – we all know what vibe we're on – we bring a variety of elements to the music that way"

Ray's more traditional approach is reflected in his resistance to focusing his studio around a computer. "I don't think I'll take that route, actually. I'm going to stick with Roland," he confesses. "You can start sounding a bit sanitised when you do everything on a computer. You spend so much time cleaning up, but there's something about a mistake that can add character to a mix. I mean, now you've got programs and plug-ins that dirty your mix back up again with crackles, and hiss and hums. I can give you that stuff naturally! To be honest, I don't need much more than a 16-track workstation and a digital desk." At which point his memory is jogged and Ray returns to that VM-3100 manual: "This fucking mixer! How do I get the digital outs working..."

Pete: "I often start a track by programming breaks" Ray: "The break and the hi hats are the last things I'd put in"

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mac toolbox

Industry news, tips, advice, and software for Mac users, compiled by *Ian Waugh*

NEWS

G4s downsized

It's difficult to imagine any other company trying this, much less getting away with it. Apparently, due to a shortage of chips, Apple have knocked 50MHz off their new G4 range. What were to be 400, 450 and 500MHz machines are now 350, 400 and 450MHz machines. They did reduce the price by a corresponding amount, too, though, didn't they? Well, I don't think so – this is Apple we are talking about, remember?

Apple have, however, upgraded various bits and pieces in the machines. They now all have a Rage 128 Pro graphics card, they are all AirPort-ready, include a DVD drive and have dual independent USB ports. In particular, the low-end 350MHz model now has the same motherboard as the other models, making it a better buy. However, the middle machine is still the best VFM.

Those staunch Apple supporters who buy the latest machines as soon as they are released must be feeling a bit pissed off if they missed the new goodies. They forgot the first rule of buying a computer – never ever buy the first release of a machine, particularly a Mac. Ah, well...

Rumour has it that the 50MHz will be put back early this year (although this has not been confirmed – or denied – by Apple). In any event, if you are in the market for a G4, it's worth waiting until Apple sort themselves out.

OS 9

The new Mac OS 9 is now available. While it boasts a host of new features, the mega new OS, named OS X, is due later this year. So is the OS 9 something you should be considering now?

Apple claim the OS 9 has over 50 new features but these are not specifically listed anywhere and even the pundits struggle to find more than a couple of dozen. It majors – again! – on Sherlock, now up to version 2, although the update does make this universal Find utility more flexible and easier to use. It can search your hard disk and the internet. If you liked Sherlock 1, you'll love Sherlock 2. If you didn't like it, it's now much better and worth a second try.

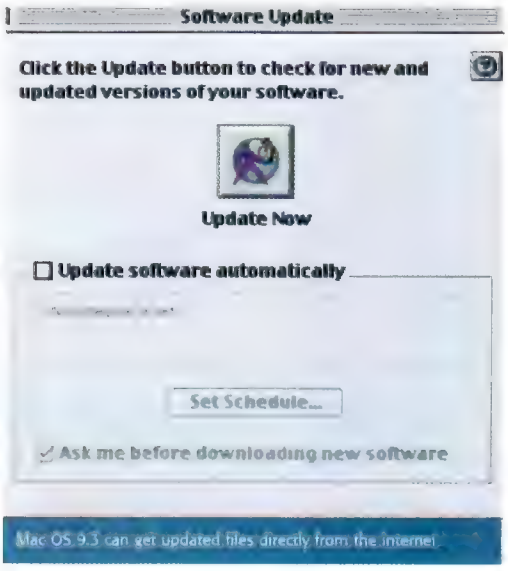
Multiple Users allows several people to use the same machine and prevents other users altering the others' files. If you're all friends, you can simply click on your name. If you're not, you can use passwords.

There's also an option to speak a phrase using voice authentication technology ("your voice is your password" and all that). Whether or not you'd trust that to give you access to your Mac every single time is another matter, but in any event, the system is not intended to provide file-level security – it can be bypassed by booting from another disk, for example. However, it does provide a hook for third-party developers to add other authentication devices such as fingerprint and retina scanners, or whatever. Yes, who's been watching too many spy movies?

If security is important to you, there's Keychain, originally seen in System 7 Pro (and dropped soon after). This remembers all your passwords and keeps them in one place. They're unlocked by one master password – forget this and it's tear time. Once Keychain is enabled and unlocked it will automatically supply passwords to applications that request them. However, to do that, the applications need to be specially written to support it.

The major benefit here will be accessing password-protected internet sites but, as yet, the Netscape and Internet Explorer browsers don't support Keychain and we can't use this feature until they do. There are also encryption utilities to protect files on your hard disk, which is useful in a multi-user environment.

Personal File Sharing enables you to share your Mac with other users over the internet. This is ideal if you


Software Update
Click the Update button to check for new and updated versions of your software.
Update Now
Update software automatically
Set Schedule...
Ask me before downloading new software
Mac OS 9.1 can get updated files directly from the Internet

Apple care – honest!

If you're a bit worried about your Mac breaking down, you may be interested in the AppleCare Protection Plan. This offers a range of options to extend the one-year warranty by up to three years. It includes a 100% parts and labour protection, on-site repairs (although this may not be the case with portable products), telephone support, access to a special area on Apple's website (does anyone else think this is very slow?) and TechTool Deluxe diagnostic software. Prices start from around £167 for an iMac (although it's only $149 in the USA) for three years and goes up to £214 for a G3. Apple's UK website has yet to list prices for the G4

need access to files from a remote location, or to allow others to share communal projects.

One major, although perhaps ultimately unimportant, aspect of OS 9 is that Apple have decided not to ship a British version. Instead, we get an International English version, where our beloved Wastebasket has been re-labelled 'Trash'.

Some changes have caused compatibility problems with certain applications, including Adobe's Type Manager and Type Reunion, Conflict Catcher and Aladdin's Stuffit. Many problems have been fixed, with updates being posted on the web, and Stuffit is included on the OS 9 disc. However, you may still come across a few apps that don't work correctly.

What's new for musicians? Well, not a lot, although we can but hope for continuing stability and support, if required, from existing music software developers. Oh, the Monitors and Sound Control Panel has been split into two separate Panels as they were prior to OS 8. Exciting stuff, eh?

For all its new features, OS 9 offers little that is innovative, and it still lacks many features that Windows users take for granted. How come there's still no disk defragmentation utility, for example? And would it be so difficult to add an uninstall utility that would remove all the file fragments that an increasing number of programs seem to scatter around your System Folder? OS 9 does, however, include a feature to update the software over the web. How long have Windows users been able to do this?

There are several 'under-the-skin' improvements, which, while significant, are unlikely to be noticed by most users. These include support for larger file sizes, the ability to have more files open at once, changes to the Mouse, Data & Time, and Users & Groups panels, and non-modal alerts, which means you can continue working if the system puts an alert message on the screen without having to close it first. It also includes Carbon tools, which should let OS 9 run applications specifically written for OS X.

OS 9 is nice upgrade but it's hardly a must-have, unless you're an internet junkie. The next biggie will OS X, and if you're managing quite happily with your existing OS you may prefer to wait and see what advantages it offers. Incidentally, OS 9 is the last OS that will support pre-G3 Macs. It costs £79, and should be available from all good Mac software suppliers.

More from Apple on 0870 600 6010
Web: www.apple.com/uk/

Warm as toast

Adaptec's Toast has long been the CD burning software of choice for the informed Mac user. The lack of competition may have had something to do with this, but the program was easy to use anyway, with the updates mainly bringing it bang-up-to-date with current developments.

Already supporting all the major CD formats, the audio CD option now supports MP3 files and songs purchased from Liquid Audio. You can, in fact, create a compilation CD of different audio file formats with Toast handling the conversions automatically. The program can also link to the CDDB website, where it can acquire album and track titles automatically.

Toast now supports Disc-At-Once (DAO) recording, which means that the pauses between tracks can be any length. Previously, Toast only supported Track-At-Once audio recording. If you are burning a CD for commercial production, it's usually necessary to use DAO mode to prevent possible errors.

The program supports IDE and USB drives (which you need if you have an iMac) and the manual mentions support for FireWire, although it merely directs you to the Adaptec website for more info about this. In total, the program supports over 500 CD-R and CD-RW drives.

Balloon Help is new, although it shouldn't really be needed. In keeping with several audio programs, particularly audio file players, Toast now has three alternative skins for different looks.

The pack also includes a couple of utilities. Toast Audio Extractor can extract audio tracks from CDs. Spin Doctor can apply a range of functions to improve audio copied from vinyl, such as noise and pop reductions, bass boost and stereo enhancement. PhotoRelay can help organise media files, and there are AppleWorks, Freehand and Quark templates for printing CD labels. The pack also includes a label printer device and you also get an audio cable.

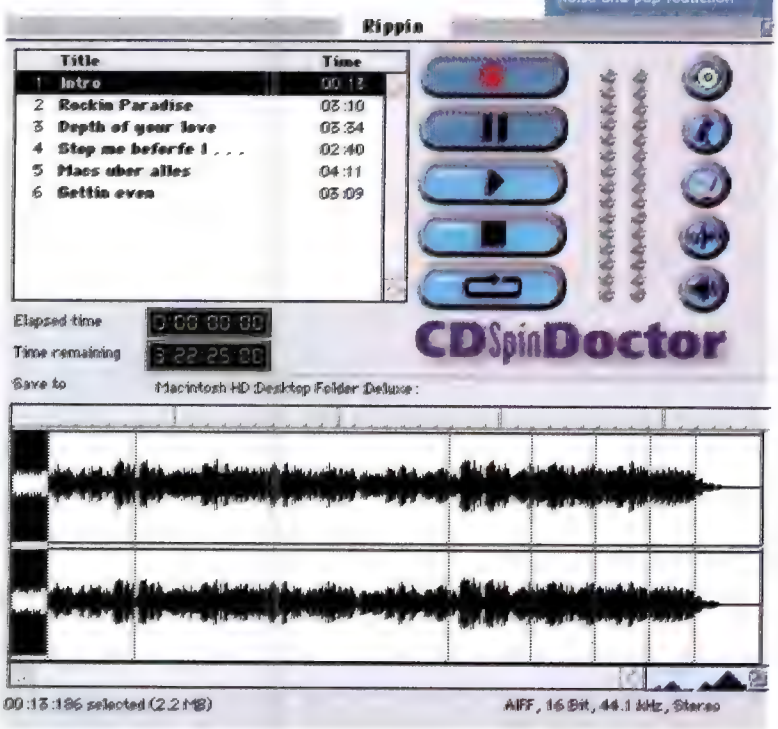
As an all-round CD-R tool, Toast 4 Deluxe is hard to beat. It does everything most users could want of such a program, and more. It's also very easy to use. Dedicated audiophiles who want to mess with ISRC, UPC, PQ subcodes and the like will need a dedicated audio editor, but for those who want to create CD compilations and demo CDs, Toast will also do all that. It's still the premier all-round Mac program.

More from Adaptec on 01276 854500
Web: www.adaptec.com

Colour co-ordination

As reported last September, iMacs and iBooks are now on sale in selected BT stores. If you choose carefully you can get a phone to match the colour of your iMac. There must be worse reasons for buying a phone

Spin Doctor can apply several processing functions to the audio, including noise and pop reduction



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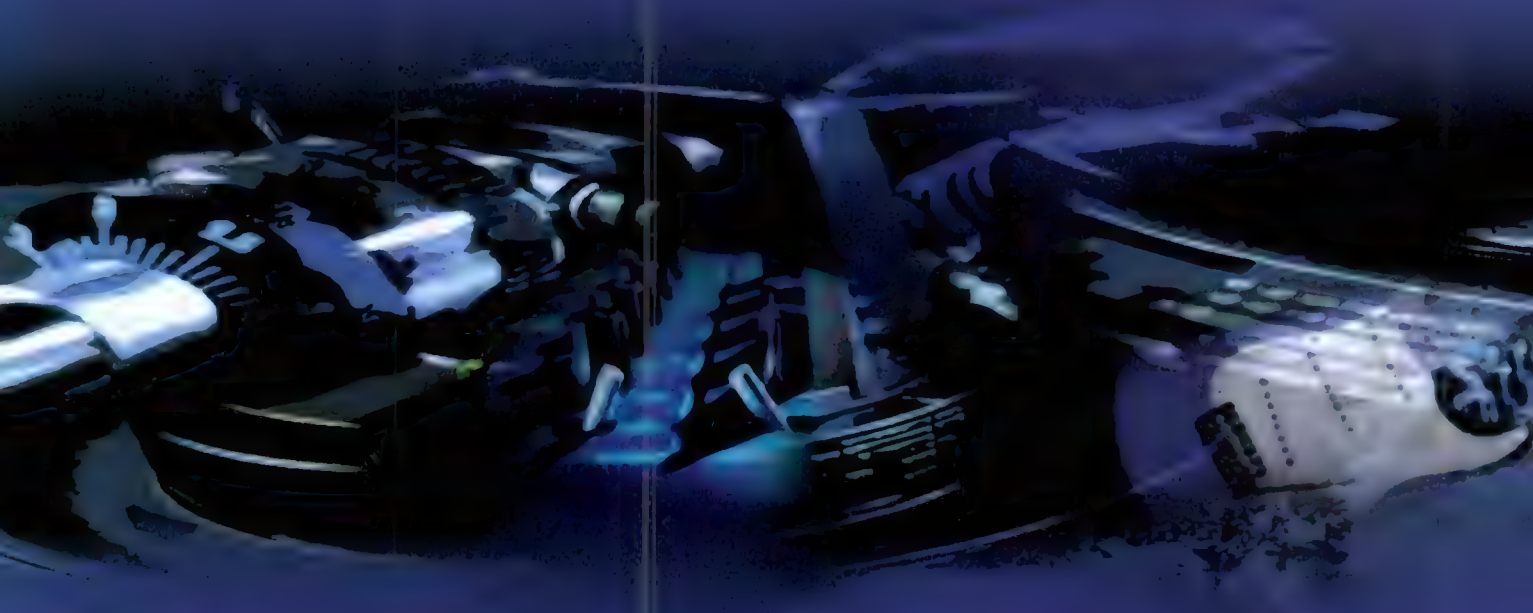

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News from the industry, advice, tips and software for PC users, compiled by *Ian Waugh*

NEWS

Intel's chips are up

Intel have struck yet another blow for low-cost PCs by releasing a 533MHz Celeron chip. Designed specifically for VFM desktop PCs, the chip features 128kB of integrated Level 2 cache and a 66MHz system buss. It is likely to be the last produced by the current method, as Intel are expected to use PIII production techniques for future Celeron chips, enabling the clock speed to be increased while reducing the cost. So look out for even cheaper chips over the coming months.

AMD (Advanced Micro Devices) provide Intel's major competition and their K6-2 chip, which can already run at 533MHz, is already used in budget PCs. AMD's 750MHz Athlon chip, released late last year, has also acquired a share of the market.

So, while we wait for Intel to release faster Celerons with a 100MHz bus, watch out for AMD's 550MHz K2-6+. Life's never dull in the chip business.

Loony Labor

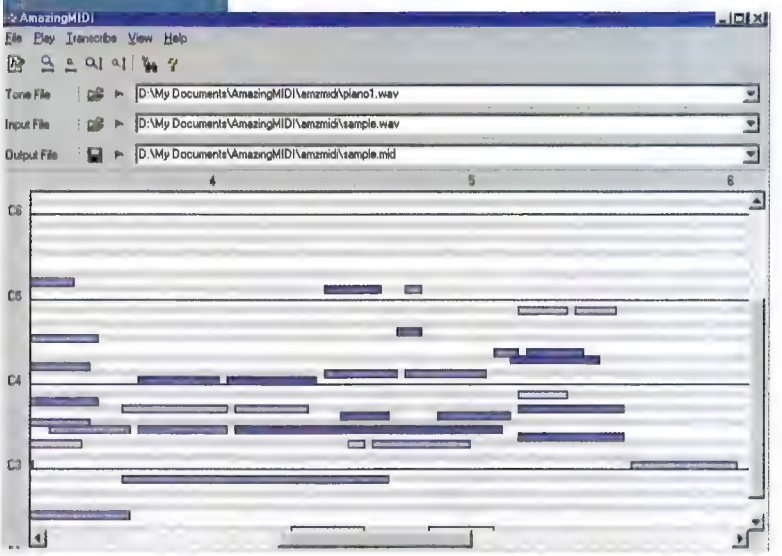
The US Labor Department has drafted a letter stating that employers are responsible for federal health and safety issues for employees they allow to work from home. This covers RSI, poorly-configured computer work areas and fire hazards, and it could affect up to 20 million US workers.

Now before any trendy lefties out there stand up and shout "yeah!", consider the potential consequences. Modern communications have made home working viable for millions of people. It generally suits the employees more than the employer, allowing them to organise their work and personal time to suit their own situation, and it allows working mothers and fathers more flexibility for looking after their offspring.

Such regulations are a supreme example of the nanny state and it's difficult to believe they could inveigle their way into the Land Of The Free. All we need is a few claims from loony employees and you can see every home worker being shipped back to the office sooner than you can say 'lawyers fee.'

They say that what happens over there soon happens over here, but there's enough nannying in the UK labour laws without any more doo-doo. It makes you wonder: if employees are incapable of ensuring their own safety in their own home, do they really have the wit to be working at all?

Can you really turn audio files into MIDI files? Here's the result of transcribing a polyphonic piano part using Amazing MIDI



Amazing MIDI

One of the most common questions we get asked, particularly by newcomers to MIDI and digital audio, is about converting Wave files to MIDI files. It's fairly simple to convert a MIDI file to an audio file, and people want to know if it can be done the opposite way 'round.

Think about it for a moment or two. What this is asking is whether or not a recording of a band, a singer or an orchestra can be fed into a piece of software – which will then carefully analyse every single note played by every instrument with any tone or pitch, and convert it into music notes. Let us say now, although probably not for the last time, that this cannot be done. If it could, you'd be able to buy off-the-shelf, note-perfect MIDI files of any song or any orchestral work, wouldn't you?

The human ear coupled with the human brain can analyse and transcribe 'audio' music, but some music is extremely difficult for even the most expert of experts to analyse correctly. Given software's ability to analyse the frequency spectrum of any audio file, you might think this should be a simple matter, but the reality is rather different.

Most of the problems are caused by harmonics. Every sound other than a sine wave contains harmonics. When you analyse a sound by breaking it down into its harmonic components, how do you determine which harmonics belong to which base

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tones? Our clever ears can do it – to a degree – but there doesn't exist any commercial software which can have even half a stab at it. At least not yet. The closest we've come is software that can analyse monophonic music lines – and preferably ones that are short on harmonics. Such functions have been included in sequencers such as Logic Audio.

Anyway, this preamble is by way of introducing a program called Amazing MIDI, which can convert Wave files to MIDI files, even polyphonic recordings. Sort of.

The major limitation is that it can only process files produced using a single tone. It requires two input files: the Wave file and a file of the tone used in the Wave file. You can see immediately that it cannot handle a traditional music recording, because it cannot identify one specific instrument from an ensemble. It will also have a stab at analysing a chord played by a single instrument, although it must be said, the more pure and free from harmonics the tone (and the recording) is, the better the results.

The program includes a sample file, which it processes quite impressively. The Help file walks you through a couple of scenarios using the sample Wave file with different tone files. The transcribe process brings up a dialogue box with several settings. One determines the smallest amplitude of the spectrum that will be recognised. Another is used to filter out harmonics and overtones, while a third sets the minimum note length to be recognised. There are other filter options, which are best left to the Help file to explain.

After analysing and transcribing, the program plays back the file in MIDI format. If it's not quite right, you can go back and mess with the transcribe parameters again. The final result is a standard MIDI file, which can be loaded into any sequencer for further editing and tweaking. If you're interested in audio-to-MIDI conversion, this is nice program to play with. Just be aware of its limitations.

Download a free copy of Amazing MIDI by pointing your browswer at: www.pluto.dti.ne.jp/~araki/amazingmidi/

Easy CD Creator 4 Deluxe

Yes, it's a bit of a mouthful but that's what it is; the fourth generation of Adaptec's multi-purpose CD recording software. The software uses a series of wizards to guide you through the various options and it remains easy to use.

The first window is used to select the function you want to perform: audio, data, CD copier, jewel case creator or photos & video. Some have further options. Under audio, for example, you can create an audio CD, use Spin Doctor to enhance and repair audio recorded from vinyl, and download and play Liquid Audio files.

You can create an audio CD from both Wave and MP3 files, and there are options to create fade-ins and outs. The process is pretty simple, essentially little more than dragging files to the track area, but there's an animated Mr Potato Head CD Guide character to help you if you need it.

Spin Doctor includes features to remove and reduce pops, clicks and hiss. It can detect silences and separate one long track into separate tracks. It can balance the loudness of tracks and morph the audio through various effects, such as reverb, a gender bender, metalizer and a talkbox; but maybe these are not the sort of effects you'd like to run your music through. The program can also log onto the CDDB database to automatically retrieve track and album names and titles.

The main options are quickly selected from a central menu

Creating data CDs is just as easy: you click and drag files into the layout area. There is also a System Backup routine called Take Two, which can back up hard disks to CDs. This is undoubtedly useful, but be aware that CDs have not grown in size as hard disks have, and a full 2.6Mb hard disk could require a dozen CDs, although there is a data compression option that reduces the number by half. Take Two is designed to work with DirectCD (although this is not essential), which is used to make your CD drive work like a large floppy disk.

CD Copier lets you copy a CD with just a few clicks, and there's a jewel case and CD label designer to help give it that final touch. Web-Check-Up logs onto the Adaptec website, checks for updates to your software, downloads and installs them. An increasing number of programs are doing this, which must be a good thing.

The pack includes a couple of bonus applications. These are MGI PhotoSuite II SE, for retouching and transforming photos, removing red eye and adding special effects, and MGI VideoWave II SE, a video editor that can add titles, transitions, audio and special effects to movie files.

As with Toast (Adaptec's CD-R software for the Mac – see *Mac Toolbox* on page 80), dedicated audio CD creators who want more control over the audio files may need a specialist application. But otherwise, Easy CD Creator 4 Deluxe should do everything most people will need. It gives a new meaning to the term 'feature-packed'. It has an RRP of £49 and should be available from all good software outlets.

More from Adaptec on 01276 854500
Web: www.adaptec.com

E-paper

The paperless office has not become the reality some pundits expected. Apart from the sheer inconvenience of not being able to carry a folder around with you, people simply like being able to hold – and read – a physical sheet of paper or a book. You can't wrap your chips in yesterday's PDA, but an alternative is being developed; e-paper.

The idea has been around for about 30 years, but it is only now receiving serious attention and support from major companies. One of the major players is E Ink, who have already developed prototype e-boards. The object is to create a thin sheet that looks and feels like paper, but whose contents can be changed electronically. Imagine plugging your newspaper into the net every morning to update it with the latest news – and still being able to read it on the tube. Or what about an electronic library book that you could change over the web for a few pence?

The technology is still in its infancy, but there are hopes that it could spawn a commercial product in five to ten years. Then there'll really be no excuse for manufacturers not including manuals with their products.

Nellee Hooper's studio, complete with Genelec 1035 soffit-mounted monitors

Hear no evil

part two

In the second part of our series on studio monitoring, we look at handling bass in the control room, and using subwoofers

words **Chris Kempster**

It's amazing how some home and professional users alike can spend hours and hours tweaking sounds, programming a reverb, or editing in Pro Tools, but only about five minutes flat to set up their monitors on a couple of breeze blocks or tea chests. It sounds amusing now, but if your livelihood depends on the music or sound you're producing, then your Heath-Robinson antics won't seem quite so funny when the TV soundtrack you've been commissioned to write sounds completely awful when played through the Director's system, and you get the sack. This is the kind of scenario that might await you if you don't sort out any problems with the set-up of your studio monitoring system.

You think I'm scaremongering? Well, maybe, but why take a chance on something that's so easy to fix? In this instalment, we're going to look at how to deal with bass frequencies in the studio, but first let's have a recap of the points we covered last time (for those of you who missed it!).

(1) Nearfield positioning: make sure that both speakers are pointing directly at the spot where you'll be mixing. Ideally you need a 60° angle between the monitors, and if they are above the height of your head, make sure they're pointing down towards your ears. Remember that for critical work (such as mixing) you need to be sitting in the sweet spot to get the correct impression of the music you're listening to. Moving out of the sweet spot will detrimentally affect the sound you're listening to, so don't make any major decisions while away from your desk. Also, make sure that your nearfields are, indeed, in the nearfield; anything between 0.7 and 2 metres between your speakers and your ears is okay.

(2) Nearfields, in most cases, should be mounted on stands. Mounting them on the meterbridge may be convenient, but you'll get a whole load of reflected sound off the panel of the mixing desk, whereas you really only want to listen to direct sound. Mounting them on stands will avoid this, and is also a solution to problems caused by mixing in front of a computer monitor. It's also preferable to mount nearfields vertically, though of course some models are designed specifically for horizontal use.

(3) Symmetry of installation: it goes without saying (I hope) that your monitors should be the same distance from the listening point, but they should also be symmetrical within the room (i.e. the same distance from the side walls). Why? Because you'll hear reflected sound off these walls, and you need to hear the same on either side, or it'll mess up your stereo imaging. The same goes for gear in front of the monitors, which should also, if possible, be symmetrical, so if you have a rack in front of the desk on one side, try to have an identical one on the other side. Okay then, let's move onto some more issues, this time regarding bass.

Bring on the bass

Why is it that you always seem to hear people talking about problems with bass in their studio, and rarely with high frequencies? Why does it seem to be that those low frequencies are so problematic? Or is it just myth? Well, it is true that low frequencies are more problematic, and the reason has to do with the radiation space in a room. The radiation space is the geometrical surroundings of a speaker, and is frequency dependent. If the speaker is in the middle of a field (for example), there are no limitations to its radiation space and it's known as 'free standing' (Fig.1). As soon as you place it in a room, however, the radiation space starts to be limited. If your speakers are soffit (wall) mounted, or right next to the wall, they can 'see' only half the space now, and if placed by two walls, the radiation space is divided by four. A typical corner, with two walls and a floor would cut this to an eighth of the radiation space of our monitor in the middle of a field. But what does this mean in practise? »

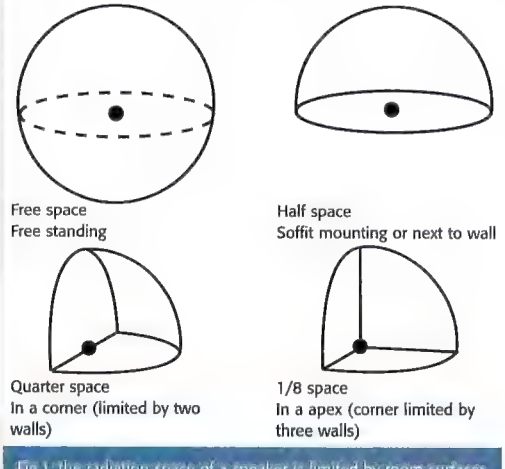

Fig.1: the radiation space of a speaker is limited by room surfaces

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A decrease in the radiation space means an increase in energy density in that immediate area (i.e. higher SPL levels), and the theoretical value is 6dB for every time the space is halved. So soffit-mounting your speakers will give 6dB of boost, and in a corner (with two walls plus floor) this will give 18dB of boost. But remember that we said earlier that this is frequency dependent, and the way it works is that the radiation space is limited by 'reflecting surfaces that are large compared to the wavelengths'. So for low frequencies this means the walls, the floor and the ceiling, for mid frequencies it's mainly the speaker baffle and objects near the speaker, while for high frequencies it's entirely the speaker baffle and driver itself. Now you understand why it's the bass frequencies that cause all the trouble?

4. +6dB bass boost at boundaries

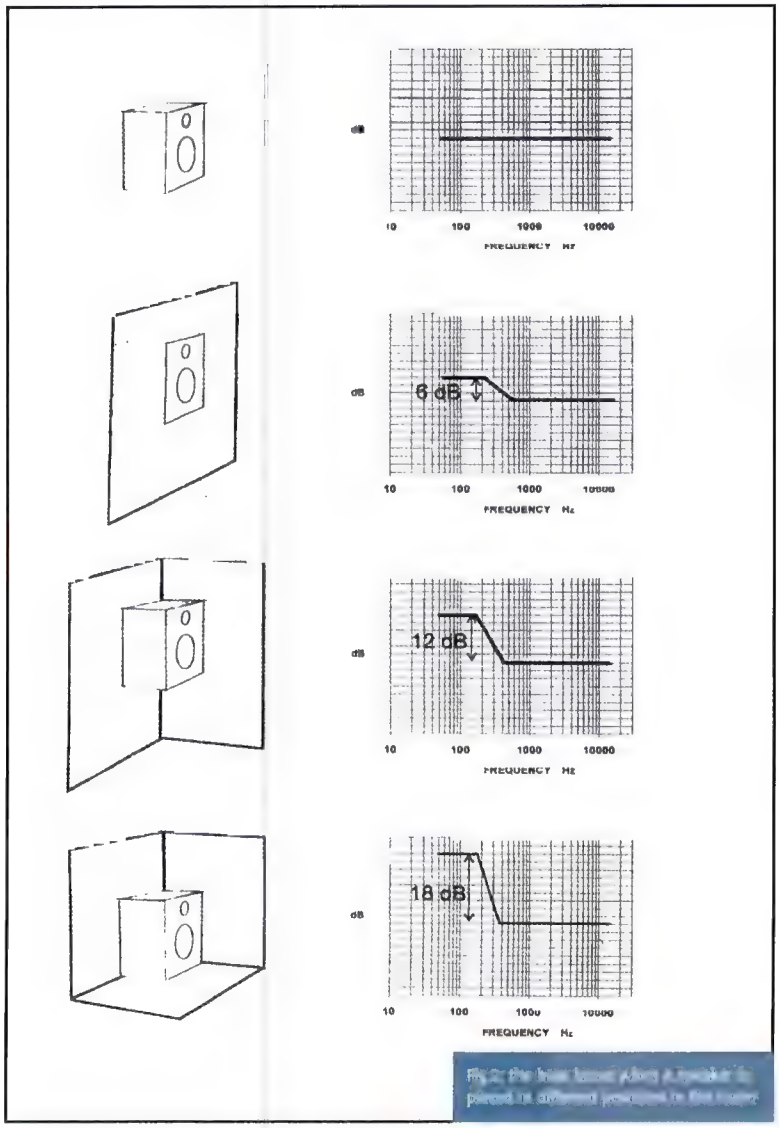
Now we've understood the effects of limiting the radiation space of a speaker (i.e. placing it in a room), and that it's the low frequency effects that are most apparent, let's look at some practical examples. Many big studios choose to soffit-mount their monitors (more of which next month), and by doing this they will experience a 6dB boost in the low frequencies (see Fig.2), since the radiation space is halved. In this case, the bass response of the speaker should be cut by at least 6dB to compensate. Placing a speaker very close to the back wall will also have a similar result, and the same action should be taken.

If your speakers are in the corners of a room, you'll experience a bass boost of between 12dB and 18dB, depending on how close they are to the floor (above about 1.3m the floor won't have a significant effect). Again, this needs to be rectified by cutting the bass response of the speaker. Great – your bass frequencies are under control? Or are they? There's another factor that has to be taken into account when deciding how far away from the walls you place them...

5. Frequency cancellation caused by wall reflections

Another reason why many studios wallmount their speakers is to avoid cancellation of frequencies caused by wall reflections. This effect is easy to explain: if a speaker is a quarter wavelength away from a reflective wall, the reflected wave returns to the speaker with a half-cycle phase difference (2 x 1/4 cycle, *kapiche?*) - i.e it's in antiphase. If this is a perfect reflection then the cancellation will be complete, though in reality this is unlikely to be the case (due to absorption by the surface). Nevertheless, the effect can be very audible indeed, and a problem that needs to be solved. Naturally, this will occur in more than one direction too, so several frequencies may experience cancellation.

The solution? Apart from flush mounting (which eliminates reflections) you can either place the speaker very close to the wall, or considerably away from the wall. In the first case, the cancellation frequency is so high (work it out yourself using the following equation: wavelength = velocity of sound (343m/s) / frequency) that the effect is overlapped by higher directivity and higher density of room resonance modes (see Fig.3). If you take this option, remember that placing your speaker close to the wall will result in 6dB of



Distance from wall D meters	First cancellation frequency Hz (D = λ/4)
0.10	858
0.20	429
0.40	214
0.60	143
0.80	107
1.00	86
1.20	71
1.40	61
1.60	54
1.80	48
2.00	43
2.20	39
2.40	36
2.60	33
2.80	31
3.00	29

Room design

Studio acoustics is a large and often controversial subject, and one that's certainly outside the scope of this feature. However, because the room plays such an important role in your monitoring system, it's worth covering a few basic points here.

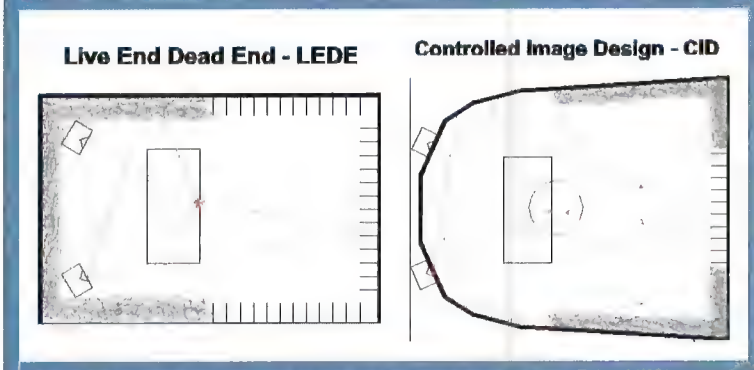
In the past, the tendency has been for control rooms to be damped so heavily that there was very little in the way of reflected sound. This obviously has its advantages, but these types of room are very oppressive to work in, and this has resulted in a move back towards more reflective rooms, with an emphasis on geometric shapes. Of these, there are two basic designs – the LEDE (live end, dead end) design, and the Hidley type. Both designs attempt to achieve an undisturbed direct sound for good stereo imaging, but they differ in their total room absorption and how it is achieved.

With the Hidley type, a hard front wall is used, with a totally absorptive ceiling, back and side walls – the speakers would generally be soffit-mounted (within the front wall). Because very little reflected sound comes back from around the room, the listener is essentially hearing direct sound. The LEDE room is the opposite – with an absorptive front part of the room, and reflective back part – and the total absorption is less than in a Hidley room. The idea with this design is to have a reverberant soundfield in the back of the room, creating a more 'natural' listening environment, like that in a concert hall, for example.

There's arguments for both designs: because of its high absorption, the Hidley room needs a lot more sound power than a LEDE room to generate high SPLs, but on the other hand it does provide the listener with predominantly direct sound (a good thing). While the LEDE room needs less power to achieve the same SPLs, it does add its own reverberation to the direct sound. Bad news? Maybe... but then, because of the time gap, the ambience shouldn't affect things since it is not perceived as part of the direct sound.

More recent developments in room design include the 'controlled image design', which uses a quite complex geometric design to direct all the main reflections in the first part of the room away from the listening position. The use of diffusers is also very common, the theory being that a more diffuse field is achieved by spreading the reflected energy in all directions – thereby making the relative positions of the source and listener less dependent.

With multi-channel formats playing an increasingly important part of modern studios business, the debate on control room design is set to continue...



Above: two currently popular room designs, with damping shown in grey

» bass boost (covered in point 4) and you'll need to take corrective action.

The other solution is to move your speakers well away from the walls, where the cancellation frequency is so low that it'll have little effect on the music anyway. But just how far away? Well, using the above equation, a distance of three metres will give a cancellation frequency of 29Hz, which isn't going to cause anyone problems. Even at two metres, the cancellation frequency is an acceptable 43Hz (2 x 4 = 8, 343/8 = 42.875), but of course this all depends on how much space you have to spare.

6. Positioning of subwoofers

Subwoofers have been used increasingly in recent years in conjunction with nearfields to give an extended frequency response in the absence of (a) a large room (b) budget for a pair of full-range speakers and (c) both of the former. But does it really matter where you place the subwoofer? Frequencies in this bandwidth are omnidirectional anyway, so surely it doesn't matter where they're placed? Well, not quite... (you knew I was going to say that, didn't you?). Firstly we should look at the +6dB effect at boundaries (covered in point 4). If you have a large room, you can place the subwoofer 3m away from the closest walls, and you'll avoid the 1/4 wavelength frequency cancellations covered in point 5. The subwoofer can be either facing the floor, or into the room, but you will have to adjust the unit's response to take into account the effect of the boundary (the floor) by taking off 6dB of gain. In a smaller room, the unit should be placed close to the front wall(s) (between 20 and 80 cm) to avoid any frequency cancellation due to the 1/4 wavelength phenomenon. If this is in the centre of the room, with two boundaries (floor and wall) then the response of the unit should be adjusted by 12dB, and in a corner (three boundaries) it should be adjusted by 18dB.

There is another factor to take into account, and that's the general room behaviour, its standing waves and axial modes. We will be covering these issues in next month's instalment, so we won't go into too much detail here. However, a quick explanation would be that by placing the subwoofer in a pressure minima (which, coincidentally, would generally be the case if you placed the unit on the floor behind the mixing desk and between the nearfields in a small room) it causes the subwoofer problems in generating high enough SPLs. One solution is to move the sub slightly off the centre line, which puts it in a more balanced sound pressure zone.

In reality, experimentation will help you get the right sub position, and this means moving it around the studio and listening closely to the result. It should be quite obvious if there is 'something missing' or if you indeed have a full low-frequency response. Whatever you do, don't just shove the unit anywhere and expect to get a satisfactory result.

Next month, we'll be looking at soffit-mounting, standing waves and other issues related to larger control rooms. All pictures and diagrams courtesy of Genelec OY.

More info

Check out the Genelec website at **www.genelec.com** for more information on setting up your speakers and control room design.

Also, for a bit of bedtime reading, get hold of F. Alton Everest's ***The Master Handbook of Acoustics***, 3rd ed. (TAB Books, 1994).

For best results, experiment with the positioning of your subwoofer in the room

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Cubase Tips

Arrange to perfection

Are you getting the most out of Cubase? This month, make your life easier by getting to grips with some of the under-used features of the Arrange window

words
Adam Crute

Hands up all of you who used to own an Atari ST. Now keep your hand up if the only reason you bought the thing was to run Cubase. Yep, thought so. Let's face it, Cubase really was the only reason to chose an Atari ST over its contemporary, the Amiga.

Now let's be a bit more controversial. Many people would never have started using Cubase if it wasn't for the free and easy availability of pirate copies, and although Steinberg probably see it differently, I would argue that their place in the market today was secured by the piracy that troubled them in the past. Once the Atari became obsolete and we had all gone out and bought PCs and Macs (oh dear) we needed to get a new sequencing package, and what better than the one with which we are as familiar as we are our own mums – namely, Cubase.

Now another question. Hands up all of you who have read the Cubase manual? Yep, thought so. You didn't need to, did you? You taught yourself how to use it when you had that naughty pirate on your Atari. Sure, you've never quite sussed out the Interactive Phrase Synth, the Logical Editor seems to be about as logical as the Teletubbies, and God only knows what some of those bloody editing icons do. But that doesn't matter, you can find your way around the program well enough to come up with masterpiece after masterpiece, right? But wouldn't it be nice to know just what all of those extra bells and whistles really do? Well, we thought we'd dispel the mysteries once and for all.

In future issues we will be running a series of tutorials, each focusing on a particular feature, to make sure you really are getting the most from Cubase. The examples and walkthroughs are specific to Cubase VST for PC, but if you are a Mac owner don't despair, everything is just as relevant, it may just be done slightly differently, and you'll have to make do with only one mouse button. Oh, you'd already realised that. To get this series underway – and to make sure we are all starting from the same point of knowledge – we are going to begin by looking at Cubase's Arrange window. Don't worry all you power users out there, this isn't going to be a lesson on recording parts or creating tracks, there is a certain level of basic knowledge used for creating songs which we shall take as read.

Group Tracks

As the name suggests, the arrange window is where you can easily alter your song's... err... arrangement. As many of us know, shuffling around all of those individual parts can often become quite a chore, so wouldn't it be nice to have some sort of MIDI pool in the same way as there is an audio pool?

To facilitate working in this pattern-orientated way we'll look at one of Cubase's most frequently overlooked features: Group Tracks. Let's say that you had a song that consisted of four main sections:

CD info

track 01
If our series has whetted your appetite to try Cubase for the first time, check out the PC and Mac demos on this month's cover CD

Fig 2: Use 'Build Group' to save moving all those parts around individually

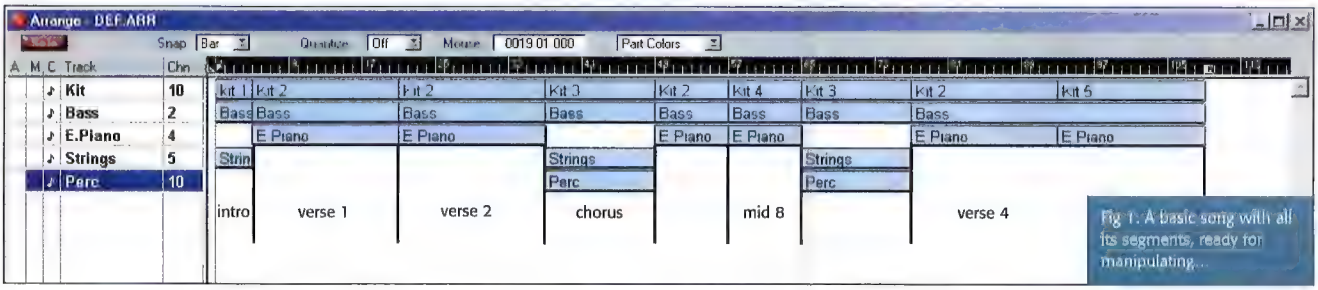

Fig 1: A basic song with all its segments, ready for manipulating...

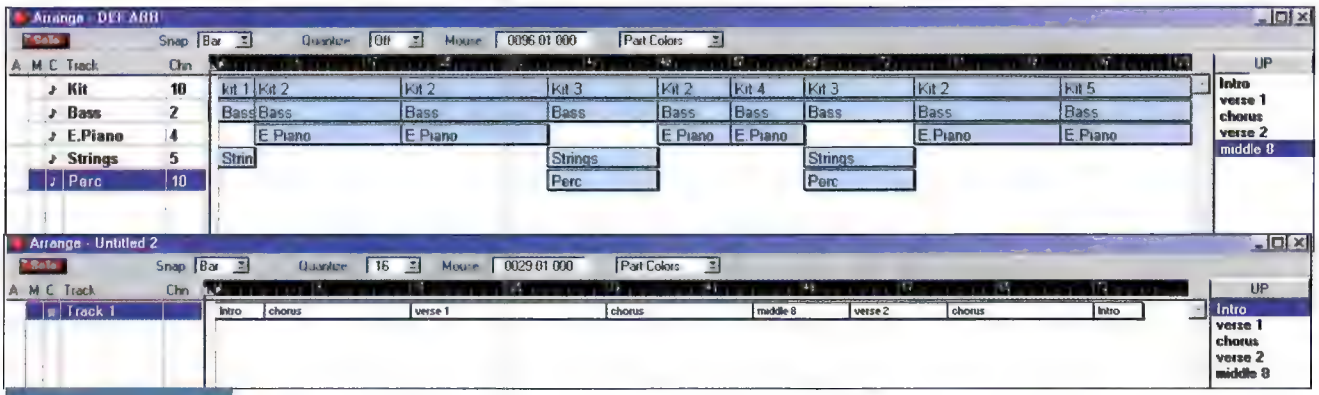

Fig 3 (top): The song

Fig 4 (above): You can now

intro, verse, chorus and middle 8 (see fig. 1). Let's assume you wanted to try various different arrangements of these main sections. Obviously it's going to become quite tedious moving those individual parts after a while – step in Group Tracks…

Select all the parts that are associated with the intro and then select 'Build Group' from the Structure menu (Cntrl+U). Enter the desired name in the window that opens and click 'New' (see fig. 2). You'll see a new column appear to the right of the screen, with the newly-created group listed.

After repeating the steps above for each song section you'll end up with a screen that looks something like fig. 3. Be sure to select only the parts that correspond to the desired section, but also bear in mind that the parts don't have to be adjacent and that their relative positions are maintained within the group. Now from the File menu create a new arrangement.

Next, you need to create a group track to place the groups into. There are various different track 'classes' in Cubase, which are set using the 'C' column of the tracklist. Create a new track and set its class to 'Group Track'. You can now drag and drop the groups out of the group list and onto the group track (fig. 4).

If you subsequently want to edit one or more parts that are contained within a group, simply select the group that contains the part to be edited, then from the structure menu, select 'Unpack Group'. The

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group's constituent parts will be restored to normal MIDI tracks.

You don't have to use groups purely for sections of songs, either. Another good use for them is to group together related instruments, like brass or drum parts. One shortfall of using groups, though, is that you cannot group audio tracks or mixtures of MIDI and audio tracks.

Global functions

Cubase provides another set of functions for quickly manipulating large numbers of parts efficiently. These are called Global functions, and are accessed from the Structure menu (fig. 5).

All of these functions work in the same way. The area being worked on is defined by the locators and any muted tracks remain unaffected. 'Global Cut' removes the area between the locators and moves all the following parts back to create a seamless join. 'Global Insert' moves all the parts that appear after the left locator to the right locator, thus creating a break in your song (see fig. 6).

'Global Split' works in the same way as the scissors tool, except across all tracks. When selected parts are split at the locator points, and if you only want to create one split, then either set both locators to the same position or move the right one to an empty area of the Arrange window. Finally, 'Copy Range' copies all events that fall in between the locators and inserts them at the current song position.

As this series continues, we'll be looking at progressively more advanced functions and features of Cubase. Until then...

Fig 5: Global functions are selected from the structure menu

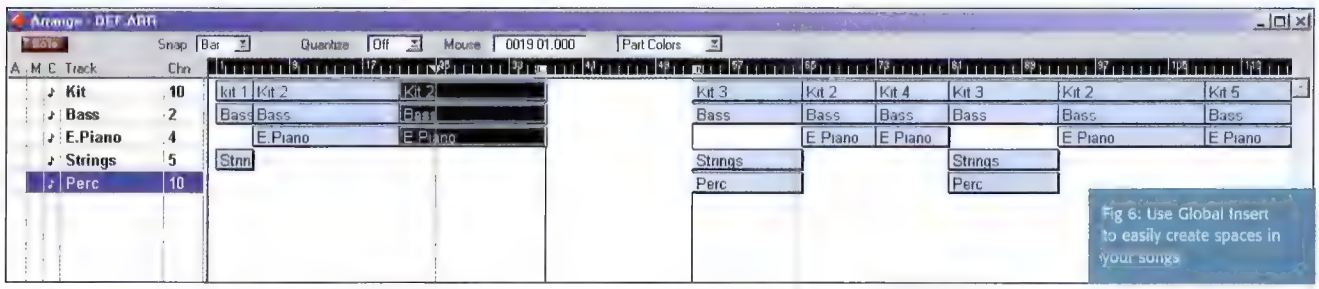

Fig 6: Use Global Insert to easily create spaces in your songs

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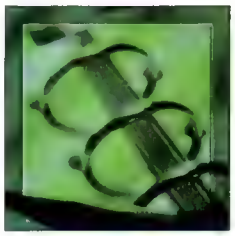


help file

Problems in the studio? Ghosts in your machines? Contact the *Help File*, where our team of audio experts try to to solve your technical torments

glossary

ADAT
Alesis Digital Audio Tape. An 8-track digital audio format based around the SVHS tape standard. Also has proprietary digital, optical I/O format, now an industry standard.

Band
A [illegible]

Capsule
The small assembly on the end of a microphone that contains the diaphragm, or moving parts.

Cardioid
A particular microphone polar pattern (area 'listened to'). Describes a heart shape pointing away from the capsule. Variations include Super-cardioid and Hypercardioid.

Clipping
When an audio signal reaches the limits of its power supply (analogue), or the highest number possible (digital), it can go no further (it's run out of headroom). Any attempt to exceed these bounds will result in the clipping of the signal (chopping the top off)

Companding
Combination of the compression and expansion processes, and the basis of Dolby noise reduction

Digital audio
The representation of an analogue electrical audio signal in digital form. That is, ones and zeros. The transfer to and from the digital domain is either A/D or D/A conversion.

the masterminds

this month's *Help File* team

NAME: Trevor Curwen
OCCUPATION: producer/engineer
CHOSEN SUBJECTS: vintage gear, microphones, meat and potato pies

NAME: Ian Waugh
OCCUPATION: technical writer
CHOSEN SUBJECTS: music software and hardware, internet, gruel

NAME: Oz Owen
OCCUPATION: *TM* reviews editor
CHOSEN SUBJECTS: Logic Audio, MIDI, processors, fondant fancies

Mister Clean

Q We need some information on the subject of cleaning console modules. We have a Soundcraft TS12 console that needs its contacts cleaned. I have seen it done with an ultra-sonic cleaner, in which the modules were placed, one by one, into a liquid of some sort and then cleaned with ultrasound, and afterwards the modules were dried. The companies doing this sort of cleaning, and renting out this kind of equipment are hard to find and we would be grateful if you could offer some advice on this one.

Jesper Westh, 2nd Floor Recording, Denmark

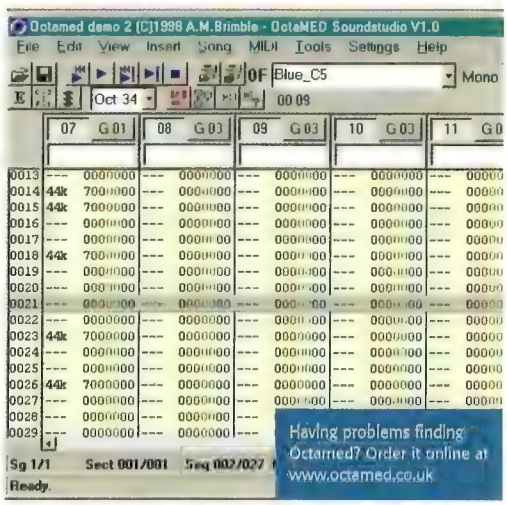
A The Soundcraft TS12 is an old desk now, and as such should be handled with care – a bit like an aged relative, for example – and ultrasonic cleaning might seem like a good idea. An ultrasonic cleaner basically involves a tub of liquid coupled to a transducer, which generates high-frequency sound waves within the liquid. As these sound waves agitate the liquid millions of times per second, the result is to gently remove all of the associated residual build-up on whatever is immersed in the liquid.

The problem with this ultrasonic cleaning, like any kind of cleaning, is that while it (desirably) strips away all the crud and scum that accumulates from a thousand late night tokin' ... er, mixing sessions, it also cleans out all the grease, which is not such a good thing. This usually causes more problems than it solves. Ideally, the best course of action would be to replace the switches, but this can be a lengthy and fairly tedious business – especially if your studio depends on having this console up and running.

So, it might cost a few Krone, but getting the replacements done by the manufacturers would be the best idea. In the first instance, I would recommend contacting MIA, the Danish distributors of Soundcraft gear, who should be best placed to advise you. And we'll even give you their details:

MIA, Linavej 9, Haarup, 8600 Silkeborg, Denmark
Tel: +45 86845699

Oz Owen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Calling Octamed

Q I have recently started using a new MIDI set-up on a PC instead of my old Amiga 500. The software I used to use on my Amiga was Octamed Pro and I had no problems, except for the limitations of memory and features. I have now just bought a copy of Data Becker's music centre and cannot get it to control my Novation Nova or my Roland D50. I can sample in sounds from CD or other sources but it is very complicated to make a tune using these samples and I can't get it to save. Is there a package similar to Octamed that I can use on my PC (I am using a Soundblaster64 Value soundcard) I read that Octamed was now available on the PC but I can't find it in any shops. Please help me – I want to make music!

Jez Allan-Smith, by email

A The Data Becker software is a little low-end, but it still ought to do what it ought to do and if you're having problems it suggests that you haven't got your system set up correctly. But leaving that aside, we do have good news for you. There is a Windows version of Octamed, called Octamed Soundstudio for Windows. You can find out more about it, download a free demo and order it online at: www.octamed.co.uk. If you're on the net, type 'octamed' into any search engine and it will come up with lots of interesting Octamed-related sites.

If you're not online, you can contact Octamed at: RBF Software, 169 Dale Valley Road, Hollybrook, Southampton, SQ16 6QX. The basic price is £35, and an additional sample CD costs another £8.

Ian Waugh

Spend my money

Q I have recently completed my A-levels, including one in music. At the moment I'm in the process of selling numerous items to get some money together for a home studio set-up. If all goes according to plan I will be looking at around £1,800 to spend. I would be extremely grateful if you could advise me on the best equipment to buy on my budget.

I would like to make electronic music, but would also like the facility to record guitar (electric and acoustic). It isn't necessary – or practical on my budget – for this to be computer-based, but I would like MIDI compatibility so a computer could be added to my set-up at a later date.

I have access to a Pentium 166MHz PC with Cubasis and a Soundblaster AWE32 soundcard. Maybe this could be considered in the set-up, but as I said, a computer-based set-up is not essential.

Jonathan Mills, by email

A Well, Jonathan, it sounds as if you have the right idea – sell everything you own and invest, invest, invest! As we all know, having a shedfull of gear in the house can only be a good thing, but with so many great bits of equipment out there, it's sometimes difficult to know what to buy.

So, on to the important business of spending your cash. A fraction under two grand isn't going to get you the all-singing-all-dancing studio I imagine you'd like – I guess you knew that anyway – but it should go some way to establishing the basic building blocks. From there you can add to your set-up as and when funds become available.

Need some advice on putting together the perfect set-up for your needs? Write to the *Help File*

You already have access to a computer, and I'll assume that your folks (or whoever owns it) won't be too happy if you monopolise it 24/7, but hey, you're a teenager, so just sneak it up to your room one night, then get all stroppy and refuse to give it back.

So, now you've got your PC, but unfortunately a P166MMX isn't going to be able to cope with too much these days, what with current software demanding speeds of 200/233MHz as a minimum. But it will be useful for running the odd audio track and all your MIDI requirements. You might want to consider getting a more up-to-date sequencer, and as you already know Cubasis, a step up to the recently-released Cubasis VST would be a good move. The retail price is £99, but upgrading from your current Cubasis – you don't say which version – will cost less.

£1,700 to go. A digital portastudio would seem like a good idea, and I see that ringing round the dealers should secure you a Roland VS1680 and a CD recorder for about £1,700 pounds. This will give you recording, editing, effects, EQ and CD burning all in the one package – and just think of the money you'll save on cables and patchbays.

This might leave you a little short, seeing as you'll need a microphone and recording channel, so the less costly VS840EX might be more appropriate – especially as they are going for a song these days. Couple this to an AKG C3000 microphone, and a recording channel like the Joe Meek VC3, and you could still have around £800 left for a few groovy toys. A baby synth module like the RSS Dark Star should give you a lot of the blurps and bleeps you're after for around £400, leaving you with another £400 for a secondhand sampler, just to give you the necessary flexibility for your compositions.

Alternatively, spend a few hundred upgrading your (folks) PC, then pick up a keenly-priced

glossary

Enhancing
A generic term for spectral enhancement of sound. One popular variation is harmonic distortion, where the source is distorted and the high-frequency part of the signal is added back into the audio, causing an overall brightening of the sound

EQ
Equalisation. Frequency (pitch) selective filtering of audio in order to boost or cut levels inside the specified frequency range (bandwidth). Further precision can be derived from alteration of the Q (bandwidth) setting.

Frequency response
A measure of spectral coloration introduced by a system. It is usually represented as a graphic plot with frequency and level axis, showing the resulting output curve from a 'flat' input. It can also be expressed as a bandwidth with level variation, for example 20Hz to 20kHz ±3dB

Filter
A circuit that operates on a selected frequency range. For example, a high-pass filter lets only frequencies above a selected range through. Common controls are frequency selection, Q (frequency magnification at resonance – in bandpass filters this can be thought of as bandwidth), and level

Gb
Gigabyte. A measure of hard-drive space, equivalent to 1024 megabytes, or just over 700 high density floppy disks.

Handshake
Two-way communication between devices. Allows two devices to react to one another's status

HD
Stands for High Density, Hard Disk, or High Definition. The first is applicable in the *Help File* and refers to High Density floppy disks

glossary

Impedance (output)
The AC load/resistance that the input circuit of a piece of equipment 'sees' when connected to that output. Impedance matching ensures the efficient transfer of power

Interface
Anything that aids interconnection. It could be a screen to a computer user, a keyboard to a drum machine – MIDI protocol to MIDI equipment

Jitter
An error in digital audio where the timing of samples varies because of poor clocking, cable problems, and so on. It's a big subject, but a steady, single reference clock and good cabling goes a long way to defeating this problem

Multitracker
Any recorder that is capable of recording more than two tracks of audio, and that has the ability to record each one separately

Outboard
Term used for peripheral equipment that doesn't directly generate or record audio. Includes effects processors, preamps, interfaces, EQ units, and so on.

Panning
Positioning a mono signal in a stereo field. On most mixing consoles, each channel can route its signal to various stereo busses; a pan control (pan pot) shares out the signal between the left and right

Parametric
Type of equalisation where gain, centre frequency, and bandwidth are all adjustable

Shareware
Software with a shareware license agreement. It is freely available on the internet, or cheaply from third-party companies. For continued or fully functional use, a registration fee is payable to the author

Digi001 (£774, reviewed *The Mix* issue 69) from Digidesign as a superb Audio/MIDI I/O for your PC. This will still leave around £800 for the synth and sampler, and maybe a little controller keyboard to make life a little easier.

Oz Owen

Dub meister

Q What is meant by overdubbing? How would the connection be for JoeMeek's VC1 or Focusrite's Voicemaster when tracking vocals using a Spirit 328 and Alesis ADAT in my set-up?

Nader Baloch

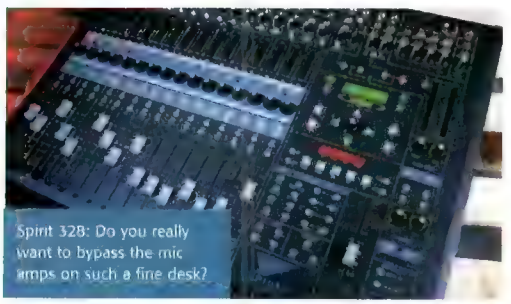
A Overdubbing is defined as adding new sound to previously-recorded material. In practical terms, it's the track-by-track process of building up a recording. When recording a whole band playing live onto several tracks, those initial tracks may be known as the basic tracks, and any tracks added afterwards will be overdubs. In a situation where you're building up a track-by-track recording by yourself, any track added to the recording after the first one could be referred to as an overdub.

Recording channels like the VC1 and the Voicemaster are designed to give a direct recording path to a recording medium – an ADAT in your case – completely bypassing your mixing desk. Think of them as a high quality short-cut directly to tape. The intention behind this type of unit is to provide a higher quality mic amp than might normally be found in a budget mixing desk. This is combined with a compressor and other useful facilities with a much shorter signal path than taking the signal through a mixing desk would usually entail.

Presumably your ADAT is digitally connected to the Spirit 328, so to use a recording channel unit to record vocals in a way that completely bypasses the desk you will have to use the ADAT's analogue inputs. Simply plug a microphone into the unit's mic input and connect the line output into the analogue input of the ADAT track you wish to record on. Each time you move to a new ADAT track you will have to repatch the lead to the relevant input.

Alternatively, to use a VC1 or a Voicemaster in conjunction with your desk while still using the digital connection, you can try connecting the unit's output to one of the 328's analogue line inputs or, bypassing the mixer's input amplifier, to the channel's insert return using the return side of a Y lead.

Trevor Curwen



Spirit 328: Do you really want to bypass the mic amps on such a fine desk?

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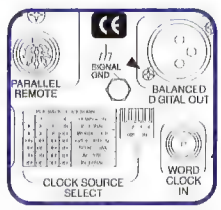

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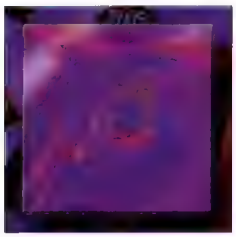
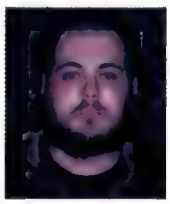


a&r dept

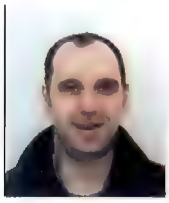
Your demos rated or slated by *The Mix* and our discerning record industry pals. Meet this month's team...

Simon Aldridge A&R, Columbia Records

Luke Cunningham Label Manager, Freedom 4



Sam Winwood A&R, Sony S2



Sil Willcox MD, Cruisin' Records

SEX IS SCIENCE DEMO

TM: Green Day having an off one is the initial impression. Punk was energy-fuelled, and although there's a certain live rawness to Sex Is Science' stuff (you might wanna look at changing the name, we politely insist), and the tracks here are pretty memorable, somehow they just lack the vibrancy and strong-as-hell hooks that are so essential for this kind of music. Could be good with a bit more concentration.
Sam: It needs serious beefing-up.
Sil: It's a bit dated, but it does have a strong energetic feel, and it sounds like they would be great live. It doesn't really have a great hook and if the drummer played it straight 4/4 and doubled up in the bridge I feel the song would rock more. Crap name, by the way.
Luke: What you get when Green Day have tea at Let Loose's house!
Simon: A band called 'Sex is Science' would probably suggest something sounding more akin to Marilyn Manson , but this a sweet melodic guitar song and very good guitar playing. But why call yourself by such a dumb name? They say names don't matter, but they do if they're crap!

More from: Hakan Lundquist Tel: +47 7351 7183

FERNANDO SAN NICOLAS SERRANO DEMO

TM: This starts out well enough; with a deftly programmed drum pattern, pretty catchy bassline, and some interesting general bleepiness. What lets it down in terms of production is space. The fact that there isn't any is really frustrating. Musically, it's competent (in fact at times it's really quite clever), but it's unclear what Fernando wants to do with it. As multimedia or games material it stands up pretty well, but if he want to hit some kind of mainstream dance style, he needs to find a much stronger identity.
Sam: It washes over me.
Sil: An electronic muddle of sounds collected and programmed in to a piece of music accompanied by a very complex drum pattern. That is all very wonderful, but...?
Luke: This bloke obviously plays Ridge Racer 4 on PlayStation a lot. He doesn't? Well, he's in for a surprise then.
Simon: If this was a restaurant I would want to eat there with a name like that, but this is, in fact, awful 'progressive fusion' made on one multi-synth and is very much like eating dry stale bread.

More from: Fernando Tel: 010 341 637 3010

demo of the month

EINSTEIN'S DAUGHTER – SAFE BENEATH THE STARS

TM: Although this smacks of Portishead (initially, anyway), it's got a quality that is unique. This is a combination of quality songwriting (subtlety being the key), decisive musicianship and a first-rate choice of instrumentation. The acoustic guitar on 'Wonderland', especially, is particularly glorious, and superbly recorded to boot. Caroline Beevis' voice sits perfectly for the slightly ambient style that is the main thrust of the ten tracks here. Caroline's production skills are right there, too, and she really knows how to use the kit at her disposal. "Madonna and William Orbit meet Kate Bush and Bjork," she reckons, and if the consistency of the tracks here are anything to go by, Einstein's Daughter deserves the same adulation that all of those people put together enjoy. Someone, somewhere, will pick up on this very soon.
Sam: A very accomplished effort from E's D. They seem to have got to grips very well with both the arrangement and production of the track, and the vocal style fits perfectly. My only gripe is that the actual song is only good, rather than brilliant.
Sil: Another well-constructed track for this month with a female vocal delivery that definitely sells the song, although I am not convinced that I would go and buy it. Personally, the snare drum is a tad annoying, and I would have preferred the production to have had a more human feel in its tempo. Yet sonically it is well produced, with an excellent Spanish guitar complementing the vocal's velvety tone in each verse. Maybe Kate Bush should try singing 'Blue Hotel'.
Luke: A good atmospheric track that starts well, reminiscent of Raissa or the Sundays. Lots of commercial appeal, although the chorus is the weakest part of the song, and needs attention.
Simon: $E=MC^2$ means if the human body travelled near to the speed of light it would totally compress in on itself, which is why we won't be doing much of that and Einstein's Daughter decided to be a singer instead. This is a 'nice' track, which will be an insult to some and a compliment to others.

More from: Caroline Beevis Tel: 0181 440 7691

JIGSAW OVERTIME

TM: Jigsaw love big orchestrated pop. And they've done a fine job here. If they drop the cheesy elements, like some of the multi-synth aspects, and concentrate on the songs themselves, they'd do themselves a big favour, and then they may even find a real identity. We've said it before, but getting out live can really help in honing songwriting skills. Hit the road, guys.
Sam: Nice and poppy.
Sil: Played with the competence of a well-gigged Northern Workingman's Club Band (with a name to match) and well-produced for what it is, yet it sounds like it came out of the '80s. It's got great horns and it's well- crafted, but doesn't sound like a band that has any real depth, so I wouldn't sign it.
Luke: Syrupy, sugary, inoffensive pop fodder. Just the sort of tune that made the Top 40 the aberration it is today. This song should be lined up and shot.
Simon: Great verse and melodically and texturally a lot like Groove Armada in style, or even Herb Alpert for those who know who he was (one half of the founders of A&M Records for those who don't). But (once again) the song is let down by the writer settling for a non-event of a chorus, that means the verse ends up being the best bit, with nothing to offset itself from, which in this particular case is not enough, really.

More from: psms@id.psy.flinders.edu.au

MOSQUITO PULSE DEMO

TM: The vocalist here is a bit of a Matt Johnson from The The type. Ya know; sultry and evocative with a kind of sweet graininess. He's also got the knack of using repeated phrases to great effect. There's some nice guitar work going on too, but the overall songwriting lets it all down a bit. Concentrate more on that angle, chaps. You've gotta be really brutal with your own work sometimes, and that's exactly what Mosquito Pulse need to do.
Sam: Take more risks!
Sil: I like what it is trying to achieve – it has an artistic direction and works well as a song. Drums and electric guitar sounds let down the overall master, but the voice is good and the chorus is strong. Contact a producer to add some 'Fairy Dust' and it has the makings of a really great track.
Luke: Echoes of The The and Talking Heads make this an interesting enough tune, but the songwriting really isn't memorable enough.
Simon: This guy probably does his hair like Scott Walker as he is quite obviously a big fan of the great man, but Scott Walker had real poetry in his soul, and inspiration far and above the norm, as well as great hair, and this has none of that. Track and arrangement ideas are quite good for a demo idea, but it's nothing more, really.

More from: Rob Maddison Tel: 0191 241 1129

a&r checklist

We receive a mountain of tapes every month, so to maximise your chances of having your demo reviewed (and, if you're really good, getting on *The Mix* CD) we need you to provide the following:

- Decent quality cassettes, (preferably chrome type II), CD or DAT.
- A kit list of the gear used to produce the demo.
- A biography of the act. We want to know all about you!
- Artwork. This can be a picture of the act, or maybe a groovy graphic.
- Lastly, and most important of all, send us extremely cool music that genuinely deserves to be going places. Not too much to ask, is it?

Unsolicited packages might be accepted at the following address:

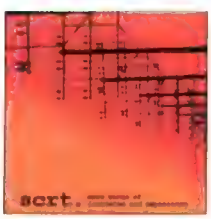
A&R Dept, The Mix,
Future Publishing,
30 Monmouth St,
Bath, England
BA1 2BW

NEELAM BLUE DIAMOND

TM: Full-on and genuine Indian music complete with some beautiful sitars and tablas, but vying to get a bit mainstream with programmed elements and live drums. Neelam says she wants to break into the mainstream, but sadly, to do that, she might have to water the whole thing down a bit. My gut instinct? Stick to what you do best, 'cos you really do it very well.
Sam: It needs more work on the vocals.
Sil: It is well-recorded and sonically well-produced, yet my experience of this type of music and its market is unfortunately non-existent, and therefore I am unable to comment. Although lyrically I haven't the foggiest what it is about, it has a strong hypnotic feel that is ironically soothing.
Luke: I'd like to teach the world to Singh (*d'oh – Ed*).
Simon: Close favourite, simply for effort and the fact that this girl sings with her heart, even though she's not really that good at it. This is traditional Indian Kabali music (sitars, tablas and so on). It is really hard to do this music well, and I have absolutely no idea what it's doing here. Here's a good idea: if you've never heard it before, go to a local Asian music shop, spend £10 on cassettes of this music and get inspired.

More from: Neelam Tel: 0181 856 6326

SCRT. MORE SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE



TM: A very strange concoction, this. Atmospheric and hypnotic, 'My Dark Places' (ooerrr, missus) combines some glorious string arrangements, embellished by subtle bass and pianos. The vocalist is a kind of Kate Bush/Tori Amos wannabe, and she doesn't do a bad job, but the vocal sound itself could do with a bit of beefing up. There's quite a cinematic quality to all the tracks here (and the guys do some of that stuff too, so it's no big surprise), which does give scrt. a strong identity, but the whole thing is nowhere near strong enough yet. It's getting there, though…
Sam: Dull.
Sil: An interesting voice, but the song seems to be made up of a strong chorus and bridge and a verse that needs attention. The girl can definitely sing, though, which is always a good sign and I can see where they're coming from, but they're not quite there.
Luke: Awful, awful vocals.
Simon: Here we have a girl singing about her "garden of earthly delights" and "my dark places". If Madonna was singing it you would be totally seduced, but unfortunately on this one we are not going to be led into any kind of temptation at all.

More from: Steve Cooke Tel: 0171 710 3261

CD info

track 02
Einstein's Daughter: 'Wonderland'
Post trip-hop collides with major singing/songwriting talent on this eerie masterpiece…

THE Mix contacts list

The complete guide to the manufacturers and distributors of the products featured in *The Mix*

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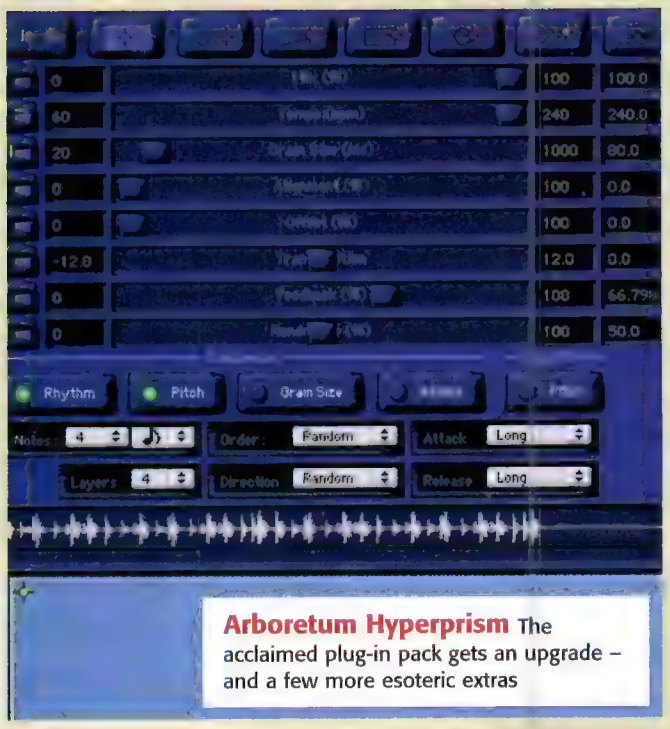
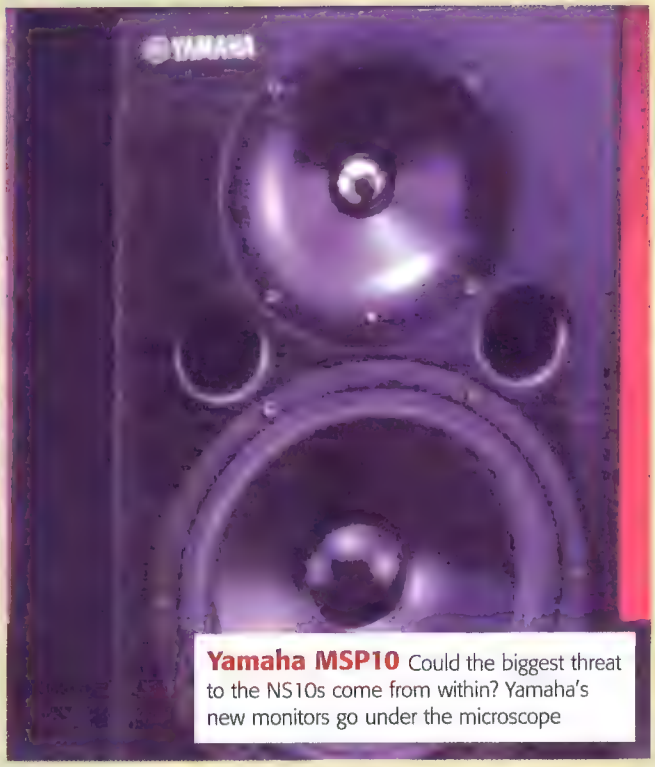


Arboretum Hyperprism The acclaimed plug-in pack gets an upgrade – and a few more esoteric extras

dbx566 We scrutinise the valve-driven compressor/limiter from the dbx 'Silver' range

Kurzweil K2600 The kings of the workstation are back – we take a look at their latest, the K2600 rack and keyboard



Yamaha MSP10 Could the biggest threat to the NS10s come from within? Yamaha's new monitors go under the microscope

May issue on sale 20th March

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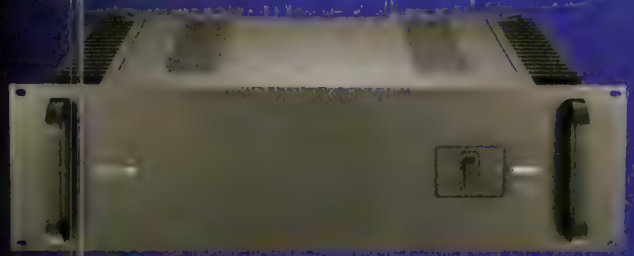
9505 AMPLIFIER



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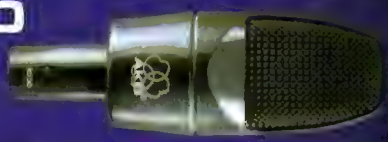

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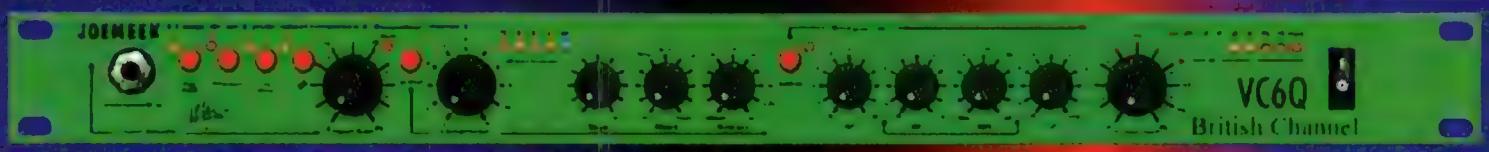

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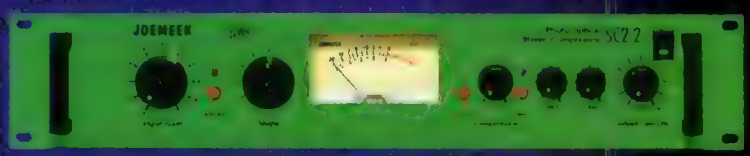

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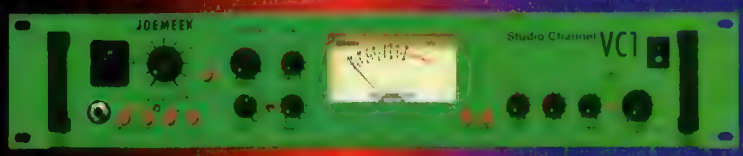

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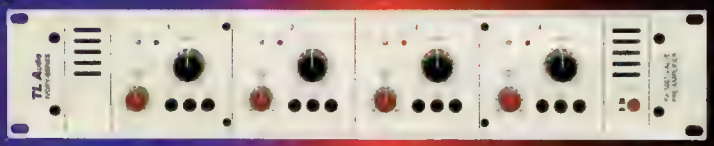
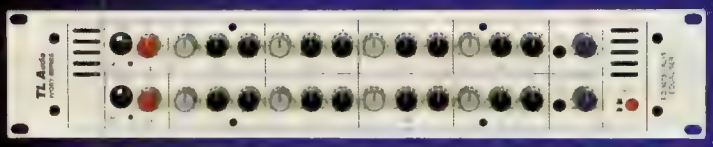
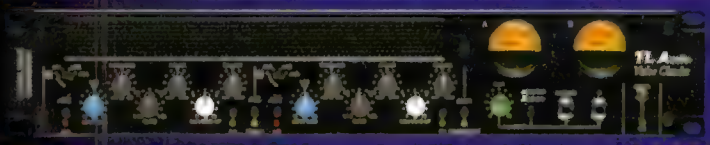


Ivory 5001 - 4 channel mic pre.....only **£340**

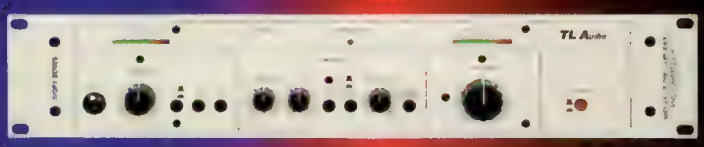


Ivory 5013 - 4 bands of parametric EQ per channel..**£340**

Ivory 5021 - 2 channel professional valve studio compressor **£340**



New Classic C1 - New studio standard stereo compressor...**£1106**



Ivory 5050 - Mono valve/compressor pre-amp...**£212**

New Classic PA1 - Valve mic pre - New improved spec **£995**

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Large Diaphragm Professional Microphone

The C 4000B represents the latest in AKG's long heritage of true 1", large diaphragm, premium microphones. The capsule has been carefully tuned to preserve the integrity of the source while offering mild compliments in the high frequencies. The optimised transformerless output stage insures the accuracy of low frequency and a nearly non-existent self-noise. Open, clear and natural highs coupled with smooth, accurate lows make the C 4000B an exemplary choice when employed on vocals and on a varying array of string instruments, brass and woodwinds. With all the on-board options, the C 4000B has the versatility to take on many tasks in commercial, project and personal studios as well as on a stage and in the broadcast studio.

RRP £467 **£297**

dbx 386

Dual Vacuum Tube Preamp w/Digital Out

- Two channel tube microphone pre-amplifier
- Selectable 96KHz, 88.2KHz, 48KHz or 44.1KHz sampling rate
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Neumann

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Neumann's fastest selling mic ever...

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Quite simply one of the finest microphones in the world. A stunning combination of classic and state-of-the-art microphone technologies. Nine polar patterns, a seven step high pass filter, and all the latest technical innovations you'd expect. The M149 Tube is the ultimate microphone.

£2700

M147

In the short time that the M147 Tube has been available, it has become Neumann's fastest selling microphone. And not without good reason.

Incorporating the K49 capsule from Neumann's legendary U47 and M49 microphones, it combines a valve impedance converter and an innovative transformerless output circuit. Resulting in a stunning ultra low noise microphone that is equally at home as a superb spot mic.

To top it all, the M147 Tube is now available at a new unprecedented price. So whatever your budget, be with the best.

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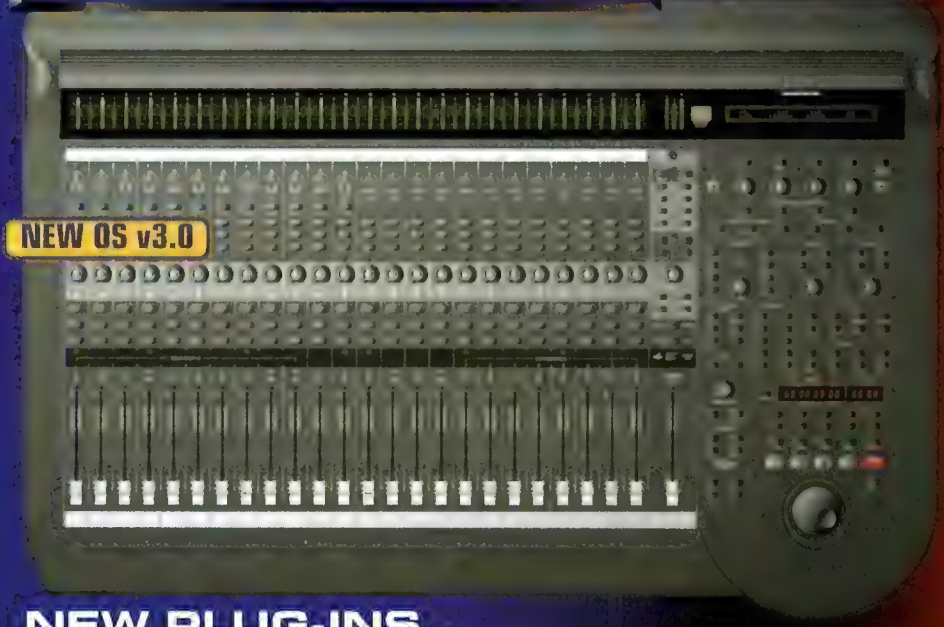
MACKIE. DIGITAL 8 BUS



- Up to 56 channels
- 96 moving faders
- 50 dynamic channels
- Optional plug-in FX
- 4 band EQ with filters

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UK's No.1 DEALER

NEW UFX CARD

The Digital 8-Bus Universal Effects Card provides robust processing power for computation-heavy plug-ins. The UFX card is a 4-in/4-out design. Up to four UFX cards can be installed in the D8B allowing up to sixteen simultaneous single-channel effects. Comes bundled with Mackie Realtime OS3 and TC Electronics TC Reverb.

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CFX20	£714
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8 Bus from...**£1531** ex VAT

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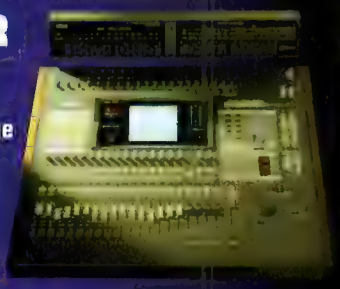

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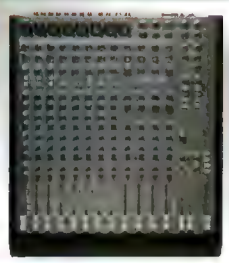

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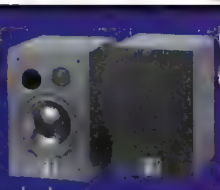

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and previews the MACKIE. HDR 24/96 throughout March

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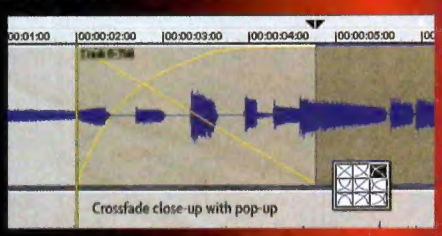

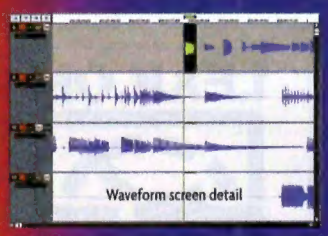

HDR 24/96 only £3400 ex VAT - £3995 inc VAT

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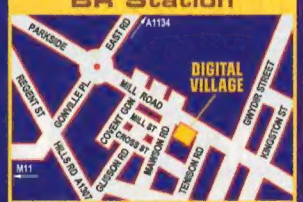

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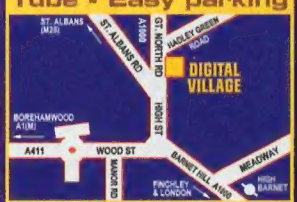

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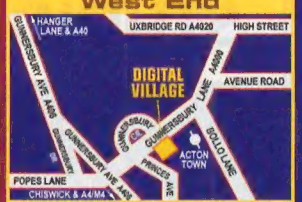

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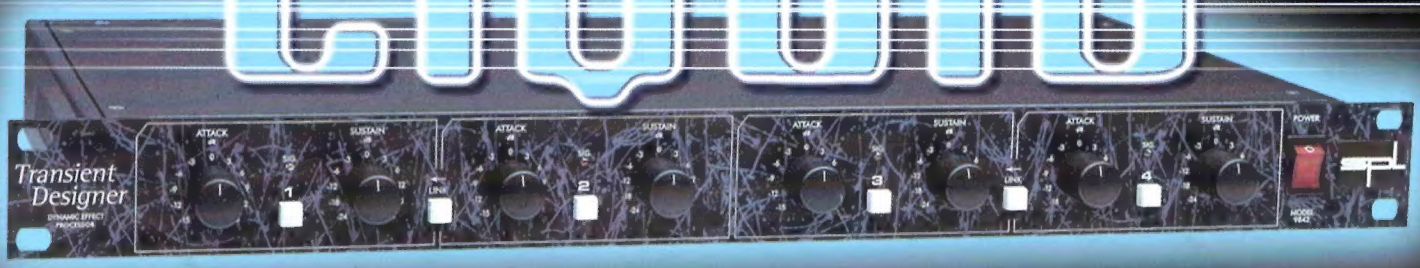

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